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ABSTRACT

A qualitative study provided a detailed description of classroom behavior by observing 20 adult literacy classes in 8 states and interviewing teachers of these classes. The methodology used was grounded theory, in which data were collected from a limited sample of cases (classes) and analyzed to find commonalities, themes, and categories that describe the phenomenon in question. Based on classroom observation, researchers divided the content and structure of instruction into these two general types: discrete skills instruction (found in 16 of 20 classes) and making meaning instruction. Despite a proclaimed emphasis on meeting learners' needs, little evidence was seen of teachers systematically assessing learners' needs or evaluating whether instruction was meeting individual or group needs. Seven classroom processes were identified that were important to understanding what happens in adult literacy education classrooms: sanctioning, engagement, directing, correcting, helping, expressing values and opinions, and community. Classroom dynamics were shaped by these three strong forces: classroom composition, enrollment turbulence, and funding pressure. The following sections are appended: Engagement; Literacy Acquisition; Teachers' Knowledge and Classroom Practice; and Continuous Enrollment and Mixed Skill Levels. (Contains 82 references, 2 tables, and 1 figure.) (YLB)

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CLASSROOM DYNAMICS IN ADULT LITERACY EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

This report is dedicated to the 20 adult literacy teachers who graciously and unselfishly participated in this study and to the several hundred adult learners we observed in their quest for literacy.

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We would like to acknowledge Alisa Belzer, Ujwala Samant, Perrine Robinson-Geller, Betty Hayes, and Marilyn Gillespie for their important and much appreciated contributions to this study.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This, the first major study since 1975 to investigate classroom behavior in adult literacy education, examines questions critical to understanding the field: How is instruction delivered, and what is its content? What processes underlie teaching and learning? And what external forces shape classroom behavior? A better understanding of these issues can influence policymakers' decisions, teachers' classroom strategies, and researchers' agendas.

Methodology

In this qualitative study, we provide a detailed description of classroom behavior by observing 20 adult literacy classes in eight states and interviewing the teachers of these classes. We selected a methodology known as grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), in which data are collected from a limited sample of cases (in this case, classes) and analyzed to find commonalities, themes, and categories that describe the phenomenon in question. Unlike in research using representative sampling and quantitative data, the findings are not meant to be generalized to an entire population. Instead, they help generate understanding and theoretical propositions for future research.

The Content and Structure of Instruction

Based upon our classroom observation, we divide the content and structure of instruction into two general types: discrete skills instruction (found in 16 of the 20 classes) and making meaning instruction. Discrete skills instruction is characterized by teacher-prepared and teacher-delivered lessons conveying factual information and obtaining literal recall from learners; use of commercially published materials; lessons with clear beginnings and ends; and a focus on reading, writing, math, and GED test preparation. In contrast, making meaning instruction (found in only four of the classes) focuses on developing higher-level abilities as well as basic skills, emphasizes teacher–learner collaboration, uses authentic materials, and views the teacher as a facilitator rather than a conveyor of information.

The better of the types of instruction depends on the perceived objective of adult literacy education. If the essence of becoming literate is the acquisition of concrete skills and factual knowledge, the norm has merit. Indeed, it would be expected that highly systematic efforts focused on factual, discrete skills instruction would yield good gains on most tests used to measure learning because these tests tend to measure this kind of skill acquisition.

If literacy also entails critical thinking, problem-solving ability, oral as well as writing proficiency, creativity, and an understanding of how society works, the norm we observed is substantially deficient. Given that teachers provide instruction in ways they know best and learners expect, changing their behavior may require protracted and intense resocialization.

Despite a proclaimed emphasis on meeting learners' needs, we saw little evidence of teachers systematically assessing learners' needs or evaluating whether instruction was meeting individual or group needs. We concluded that teachers are so intensely socialized into a teacher-centered form of instruction that they cannot avoid it, regardless of their desire to be learner centered. However, we found that teachers behaved in learner-centered ways in their affective relationships with learners.

Social Processes in the Classroom

We have identified seven classroom processes important to understanding what happens in adult literacy education classrooms: sanctioning, engagement, directing, correcting, helping, expressing values and opinions, and community.

Interesting lessons promoted engagement, whereas ambiguous, too easy, or too difficult lessons, as well as disruptive learners, sometimes impeded engagement. In general, however, teachers directed and learners complied. Teachers also monitored the classroom for verbal and nonverbal signs that learners needed help and offered positive sanctioning in the form of praise as they provided help.

Across our sample, we observed considerable tardiness and tuning out. Learners arrived in class up to an hour late, and tuning out ranged from briefly staring into space to sleeping in class. Unlike in most other educational settings, these behaviors were almost universally tolerated rather than negatively sanctioned. It is likely that teachers consider these behaviors part of the reality of the adult literacy classroom.

Although learners are clearly not engaged in the instruction when they are tardy or tuning out, we believe there is a more important concern. To a significant extent, tardiness is symptomatic of concerns that interfere with attendance, such as childcare, transportation, and work. Tuning out may be caused by fatigue, failure to comprehend the lesson, lessons that are too easy, or other sources that interfere with learning. We suspect the greatest significance of these behaviors is that they may be symptoms of an intention to drop out, an endemic problem for adult literacy education. Through systematic research, we need to better understand how tardiness and tuning out relate to dropping out. This could help teachers identify learners at

risk of dropping out, while there is still an opportunity to intervene. It might also lead to new ways of teaching that could reduce the threat of dropping out.

In two thirds of the classes we observed, teachers rarely asked learners about their feelings, opinions, or beliefs. This lack of open discussion may impede development of important literacy skills. Even for the highly educated, most of the business of life is conducted orally, and the ability to make a convincing oral argument is important for success in the family, community, and workplace. Furthermore, discussions in which learners interact with other learners can develop such important group-dynamics skills as knowing when to assert and when to defer, or when to speak and when to listen.

If teachers fail to introduce discussion into the classroom because they lack facilitation skills, developing such skills is an obvious topic for professional development. If teachers fail to introduce discussion because they do not consider it an important aspect of literacy learning, curriculum development is warranted.

Nearly all the classes we observed exhibited some elements of community, but in only about a quarter of the classes was community pervasive. We found three factors associated with community: learner collaboration with learners, teacher support for a community environment, and inclusion.

As our research did not include an outcome assessment component, we cannot infer with certainty that community has a positive effect on learning. The relationship between community and key instructional outcomes in adult literacy education needs to be ascertained through additional research. Assuming that community is indeed important, we need to train teachers to develop and maintain it. In our opinion, the place to start is with inclusion. We suspect that helping teachers understand that inclusion is important and equipping them with brief but effective inclusion activities to use with new learners could provide important gains with little expenditure of resources.

Shaping Factors

Classroom dynamics were shaped by three strong forces: classroom composition, enrollment turbulence, and funding pressure.

Relatively homogenous classes seemed to promote sharing and community. The most important elements of classroom composition were gender, age, and ethnicity. When classes were more diverse, particularly in terms of ethnicity, opportunities for both cross-cultural learning and intercultural conflict increased.

Continuous enrollment made it difficult to create a sense of community because class membership was always in flux. It also made it difficult for teachers to use complex teaching methods, such as project-based learning or peer coaching. Based on everything we have observed, continuous enrollment and mixed skill levels are two of the most serious and understated problems facing adult literacy education today.

Continuous enrollment and, to some extent, classes with mixed skill levels are products of high dropout rates. As it is unreasonable to expect that the dropout problem will be solved either soon or easily, calls to end continuous enrollment and mixed levels are probably not feasible. Better ways to manage continuous enrollment and mixed levels are possible, however. First, a systematic search for the best practices in managing continuous enrollment and mixed skill levels should be made. After these practices have been evaluated for efficacy and feasibility, they should be disseminated to teachers and program administrators through professional development and other means.

Funding pressure affects what happens in adult literacy classrooms in at least two ways. Funding source regulations and eligibility requirements often determine what kind of learners will be served, the type of instruction they receive, and how long they can stay. The amount of funding affects such things as hours of available instruction and class size.

It is clear that how funds are allocated is as severe a problem as the amount of funds available. Although the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) is designed to address some of the allocation problems, it can only do so if adult educators at the local level participate substantially in the decision-making processes WIA establishes.

Efforts to improve the quality of adult literacy have to focus on instruction and classroom behavior. When all means of improving instruction quality are considered, professional development stands out as the most important. At the state level, development of comprehensive, well-planned professional development systems is vital. This requires leadership, strategic planning, and resources.

Under the 1998 Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Title II of WIA, expenditures for professional development are permitted but not required. If professional development is to receive the resources it needs, the law needs to be changed to make staff development a mandated function once again and to increase funds available for it.

CLASSROOM DYNAMICS IN ADULT LITERACY EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

What happens in adult literacy education classrooms? How is instruction delivered, and what is its content? What are the processes that underlie teaching and learning, and what forces external to the classroom shape classroom behavior? These questions are critical to an understanding of adult literacy. Accordingly, one would expect there to be a substantial body of research that addresses them. Such is not the case, however. Indeed, before now, only one major study, *Last Gamble on Education* (Mezirow, Darkenwald, & Knox, 1975), had investigated adult literacy classroom behavior in the United States.

Classes are the most basic organizational unit of the adult literacy education programs in the United States, and teaching and learning are the most fundamental processes in these classes. An understanding of what happens in adult literacy education classrooms is critical for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers alike. When policy is made in the absence of a basic understanding of classroom behavior, it is made in a vacuum, leading to ill-informed policies that are impractical, ineffective, and even damaging. Although most program administrators may have a basic understanding of what happens in their own program's classrooms and teachers are obviously familiar with their own classes, they do not necessarily understand what happens in other programs. This lack of exposure to other approaches restricts adult educators' ability to know about and use alternative strategies to improve practice. Researchers must have a thorough understanding of classroom teaching and learning if they are to pose relevant research questions.

The objective of this research was to provide a detailed and comprehensive analytical description of classroom behavior in adult literacy education. The best way to meet this objective was through actual classroom observation. Trained data collectors observed 20 diverse adult literacy education classes in eight states on two separate occasions. Each observation lasted at least an hour and a half and was supplemented by a 45-minute interview with the teacher. The study addressed three basic questions:

- What is the content of instruction, and how is content structured?
- What social processes characterize the interactions of teachers and learners in the classroom?
- What forces outside the classroom shape classroom behavior?

This report is organized into seven chapters. Chapter One describes and discusses the study's methodology. Chapter Two presents a review of the relevant literature. In Chapters Three though Six, we presem our findings. Specifically, Chapter Three focuses on the context of adult literacy education, Chapter Four examines the content and structure of instruction, Chapter Five discusses classroom process, and Chapter Six centers on the forces that shape classroom behavior. In Chapter Seven, we present conclusions and implications.

CHAPTER ONE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to provide an analytical description of classroom behavior in adult literacy education. The study was qualitative in design. Data were collected primarily through observation of 20 adult literacy education classes and interviews with teachers.

As there was very little previous research on classroom behavior in adult literacy to guide us, we selected a methodology known as grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Rather than testing or verifying theory or hypotheses generated from previous research, grounded theory generates understanding and theoretical propositions from the data, in a "bottom up" approach. In grounded theory methodology, data are collected from a limited sample of cases (in this case, classes) and analyzed to find commonalities, themes, and categories that describe the phenomenon in question. Unlike in research using representative sampling and quantitative data, findings are not meant to be generalized to the entire population of classes. Instead, findings help generate understanding and theoretical propositions and hypotheses for future research.

Sample Selection

In planning the study, one of the first decisions we faced was the selection of a sample of classes for study. We decided on 20 sites as our sample size for two reasons. First, based on our experience as adult literacy education researchers, we believed that 20 sites would provide sufficient data for meaningful analysis. Second, resource limitations prevented us from collecting data from more than 20 sites. Because a qualitative, grounded theory methodology precludes generalization to a larger population, we did not seek to create a representative sample. Rather, we selected a sample designed to maximize the diversity of the classes we were to study. We did so by first identifying characteristics that previous research has shown to significantly affect adult literacy education.

- Location: Urban, rural, suburban.
- Skill level: Beginning, intermediate, GED.
- Institutional sponsorship: Public school, community college, community-based organization.
- Program type: Basic literacy, workplace literacy, family literacy, welfare-sponsored classes.
- Instruction type: Group-based, individualized, blend.
- Class size: Small (1–8 learners), medium (9–14 learners), large (15 or more learners).

The classes were selected from eight states (Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, and California). Although the states we selected represent considerable diversity, Northeastern states relatively close to New Jersey predominate because of our limited travel resources.

Each of the factors and options listed above was represented by at least one of the classes we studied. Table One presents the distribution of characteristics across the classes selected for our sample:

Table One: Characteristics of Sample Classes

Program/Class Type	Number
Location:	
Urban	12
Suburban	5
Rural	3
Skill Level:	
Beginning	4
Intermediate	5
Advanced (GED)	5
Mixed	6
Institutional Sponsorship:	
Public School	9
Community College	4
Community-based Organizations	7
*Program Type:	
Basic Literacy	18
Workplace Literacy	2
Family Literacy	4
Welfare-sponsored Classes	3
Instruction Type:	
Group-based	14
Individualized	3
Blend	3
Class Size:	
Small (1–8 learners)	7
Medium (9–14 learners)	10
Large (15 or more learners)	3

*Total exceeds 20 because some classes represented more than one type.

Initially, our decision to create a very diverse sample of classes concerned us, as we feared differences between classes might be so great we would be unable to make sense of our data. However, this did not turn out to be the case. Indeed, as we analyzed the data, we were continually struck by the similarities that crosscut our diverse sample.

To identify the individual classes for the study, we developed a selection protocol that would allow us to cover the range of factors. We then began by contacting adult literacy professionals who were very familiar with adult literacy programs in their area. They included program administrators; staff developers; and, in one case, a state director. These contacts were then asked to identify programs and/or classes that fit our selection criteria indicated in Table One. Contacts were instructed to identify programs and classes that were not necessarily "the best" but were typical classes for the selection criteria. Subsequently, we contacted the person at the program level who could grant access, and we selected classes. Refusals were very rare (about five percent). Once teachers had agreed to participate in the study, their names and contact information were supplied to one of our data collectors, who then made the necessary appointment for data collection.

Table Two presents the number of classes in the sample by state.

Table Two: Number of Sample Classes by State

State	# of classes in sample
California	3
Connecticut	1
Massachusetts	1
New Jersey	5
New York	3
Pennsylvania	4
Rhode Island	1
Tennessee	2

Data Collection

Data were collected by 10 data collectors. Approximately one quarter of the observations and interviews were conducted by Patsy Medina, who had 20 years of experience in adult literacy education as a teacher, staff developer, and researcher.

Of the remaining nine data collectors, six were graduate students in adult education at Rutgers University, one was a graduate student at Harvard University, one was a researcher employed by the University of Tennessee, and two were private consultants.

Data collectors were trained with a written data collection protocol that specified the kind of data to be collected, procedures for collecting data, and guidelines for preparing field notes and assuring confidentiality. Because the data collectors from Harvard University and the University of Tennessee as well as the private consultants were experienced literacy professionals and researchers, training was limited to a review and discussion of the protocol.

Because the graduate students at Rutgers University had less experience, they were trained more extensively, in two sessions. During the first session, which lasted about two hours, the protocol was explained in detail, and solutions to the various problems and situations that could arise in data collection were role-played.

Because the validity of observational research is largely dependent on accurate and detailed field notes, the second training session focused primarily on field-note preparation and analysis. Each of the Rutgers data collectors was instructed to complete one observation, prepare field notes of the observation, and share the notes with the researchers and other data collectors. Then, in a three-hour seminar, the field notes were critiqued for detail and analytical value. When a weakness was identified, the nature of the weakness was explained, and the data collector was instructed how to correct it.

Data collection began in October 1997, concluded in April 1999, and consisted of two one-and-a-half hour classroom observations and a 45-minute teacher interview. Teachers were asked to complete a brief background survey that gathered information about years of experience, part-time/full time employment in adult literacy education, hours worked per week, number of learners enrolled, instructional level of the class, ethnic composition of the class, instructional materials used, and how typical the observed class was in comparison to other classes the teacher taught.

Typically, the second observation of a class was conducted a week after the first observation, and the teacher was interviewed between observations. Teacher interviews were open-ended and linked directly to the first observation. Teachers were asked to explain what they had attempted to accomplish in the observed class and why. In addition, data collectors were directed to clarify with the teacher anything they had observed that was unclear to them. With this approach, the

teacher interview was directly framed and grounded in the reality of an observed class. Observations and interviews were audiotaped. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the audiotapes of observations served as an accuracy check and source for direct quotes for data collectors as they prepared comprehensive field notes.

Data collectors were instructed to meet the teacher 10 to 15 minutes before class to receive a short briefing on the class to be observed and to ask the teacher to introduce the observer to the class. The data collectors were also told to find a good vantage point in the classroom and to provide as much detail as possible in their field notes. This included descriptions of the classroom settings as well as the nonverbal behavior of students and teachers. To allow us to gauge the duration of class activities, data collectors noted the time at 10-minute intervals in their field notes. In addition, they were encouraged to make analytical and explanatory comments in their field notes, and these were separated by brackets from the observational data. According to the protocol, data collectors were to serve as passive, unobtrusive observers. However, in a small minority of cases, the teacher asked the observer to serve as a classroom aide. In these situations, the request was honored.

Data Analysis

From the patterns of similarities and differences in the sample classes, we identified thematic categories that described what we had observed and learned from the teacher interviews.

Five classes early in the study generated an initial set of categories. Because we were focusing on classroom behavior, most categories focused on the actions and interactions of teachers and learners, such as helping and directing. As more data were analyzed, these categories were refined, and new categories were added.

Coding was assisted by the NUD*IST computer program. Text data are first entered into the computer. Then, segments of text representing a category are blocked, assigned a category code, and saved into files representing the coded categories. NUD*IST's primary advantage is that it enables the researcher to access every instance of a coded category, including the most mundane and routine. This serves as a check on the tendency of some qualitative researchers to overemphasize episodes they find particularly intriguing. The disadvantage of NUD*IST is that it disembeds the coded text from the entire observation, causing the researcher to lose the larger context. To rectify this problem, we entered extensive comments and category codes into the margins of the field notes themselves, and entire observations, as well as their NUD*IST-coded pieces, were read and constantly reread to familiarize analysts with the larger context. Although the authors were

primarily responsible for data analysis, they continually shared emerging findings with other project professional staff for critique.

Limitations

There are three limitations of this methodology. First, the study is based on two observations in 20 classes. It thus represents a broad, panoramic, macropicture rather than an in-depth microanalysis. Given the lack of previous research on classroom behavior, a broad approach seemed the appropriate starting place. Although a microanalysis featuring fewer classes and more observations per class might have allowed a more detailed analysis of such things as instructional strategies, we might have lost the larger perspective had we chosen such an approach.

A second limitation derives from the nature of classroom observation itself. Observation is a very direct and powerful but imperfect form of data collection. It enabled us to see classroom behavior directly, rather than rely on secondhand accounts given in interviews. However, it is filtered through the eyes of the observer, and different backgrounds and interests cause observers to emphasize slightly different behaviors in their data collection. Although observation can depict what is happening in a classroom, it cannot reveal what is going on in the minds of the participants. Thus, in some cases, we witnessed clearly important behaviors but could not infer motivation. For example, in several instances, we observed learners sleeping. Were they exhausted? Were they bored? Was the lesson too easy or difficult? Observation alone could not answer these questions. Finally, it is always possible that the presence of the observer influenced the behavior observed. Because both the learners and our observers were adults, and because close scrutiny of our field notes did not indicate cases of obvious distortion, we do not believe that this was a significant problem.

The third limitation arises from the way we selected sites. The sites were typically nominated by program directors or staff developers. Although we asked nominators to select an average class of the type we were seeking, it is possible that nominators selected better classes and avoided the worst.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review was one of the most difficult portions of the project for two reasons. First, because we were using a grounded theory methodology, we were not drawing on an established and coherent body of literature for theoretical frameworks or hypotheses to test. Second, and most important, the adult literacy literature that could be applied to such a broad study as this is fragmented and very difficult to synthesize in any meaningful way.

Introduction

Generally speaking, a literature review summarizes and synthesizes the research literature that informs a study and, in doing so, makes clear what is already known about the phenomenon. A literature review is usually one of the first steps in the research process and is typically completed before the research methodology is finalized. In the case of this research, however, the classical use of a literature review was problematic. First, as mentioned earlier, we were able to identify only one other large-scale study of adult literacy classroom behavior, *Last Gamble on Education* (Mezirow, Darkenwald, & Knox; 1975). Second, as Fingeret noted in 1984, the research literature on adult literacy education is fragmented and often confused. Based on our experience, this has not changed substantially since then, making synthesis of the relevant literature difficult.

Given the lack of research on classroom dynamics in adult literacy education and the general disarray of the existing literature, we deemed empirical studies of classroom behavior, teaching, and instruction—though few in number—the most relevant. In addition, we looked to a relatively large body of prescriptive literature that advocated particular classroom practices but was not based on empirical research. Although this literature was sometimes conflicting and difficult to synthesize, we have included some of the most relevant selections.

As our initial search of the literature did not provide the guidance we sought, we continued the search well into our data collection period. We noted that what we observed did not reflect the prescriptive literature or adult education theory, although there were connections with the findings discussed in *Last Gamble on Education*. In our continued quest for pertinent literature, we came upon the work of Mehan (1979), who had conducted an observational study of an elementary education classroom. The parallels between what he found and our own observations were substantial, and Mehan's work ultimately informed our study in a significant way.

The Empirical Literature on Adult Literacy

The first and until now only large-scale study of adult basic education that employed classroom observation was *Last Gamble on Education* (Mezirow, Darkenwald, & Knox, 1975). Although it used a number of data collection methods, including interviews with program administrators and a survey administered to 1,900 teachers, its classroom observation component is most relevant to our study. *Last Gamble* researchers observed 59 basic literacy and ESOL classes in five cities at two-week intervals. Like our study, the *Last Gamble* study employed a grounded theory methodology.

It found that the learners in the observed classes were quite diverse and that this impeded formation of true groups, sharing of experience, and peer teaching. As researchers noted, "Participants, by and large, come individually, leave individually, and largely fail to socialize even during class breaks" (p. 11). Because of high dropout rates, teachers were under pressure to maintain enrollment and were extremely concerned with keeping accurate attendance records. Many traditional classroom conventions were relaxed. Learners often arrived late and exhibited tuning-out behaviors not sanctioned by the teacher, and grades were not given. Mixed skill level and continuous enrollment classes were the norm.

With respect to instructional interaction, the authors noted,

> The mode of instruction is that of the elementary school of the 1920s before all those "progressive educators" began their tinkering. Drill, recitation, group blackboard work, doing assignments in class, using workbooks, and routinization are familiar hallmarks. There is substantial evidence from the field attesting to the remarkable durability and pervasiveness of the present-recite/test-correct approach. (p. 18)

During instruction, factual information was emphasized. After lessons, question and answer "recitations" were common. Teachers attended to learners by having them take turns at receiving attention, searching out those who seemed to be having problems, serving as a resource person (e.g., calling learners to the teacher's desk for help), directing them to help each other, and having classroom aides render assistance.

In the classes the *Last Gamble* researchers observed, there was a great emphasis on reducing learners' failure.

> Although the structure of the instructional process is traditional, the process itself has been modified to define failure as such out of existence in the classroom and

> minimize its increments in teacher–student interaction. The only failure becomes the failure to come to class. And, of course, the pressure to maintain attendance substantially fosters the ideology on minimum failure. (p. 30)

To help reduce learners' failure, teachers often broke tasks into their simplest components, rewarding successes with praise, and allowing learners to skip over difficult assignments. Teachers' control over learners was characterized as being loose. "Tight control tantamount to that found in high school is simply not feasible or necessary" (p. 34).

Although *Last Gamble* is more than 25 years old, and although only urban programs were studied, its findings still have relevance today. Its relation to our own findings will become apparent later in this report.

More recently, McCune and Alamprese (1985) conducted a study to gather information about the organization and needs of adult literacy services across the United States. Using open-ended interviews as their primary data collection method, they interviewed two separate samples. The first sample was comprised of 10 representatives from major professional organizations connected to literacy and national organizations that directly sponsored or funded adult literacy programs. The second sample consisted of 50 local adult literacy program coordinators, representative of all sectors of the adult literacy delivery system.

McCune and Alamprese's findings included general information about classroom instructional approaches and materials that are relevant to our study. The authors found that individualized instruction was the primary mode of instruction, with a significant portion of the sample using group instructional strategies. There was no consistent pattern to the programs' instructional materials, but most used commercially published materials, interspersing these with materials teachers created themselves.

While McCune and Alamprese provided a general overview of practice in the field of adult literacy, Lerche (1985) set out to identify particularly promising classroom practices. Our research team visited 35 of the 338 "exemplary programs" nominated for participation in the study. Lerche asserted that successful instructional programs were based on clearly stated behavioral objectives and claimed that "the most consistently successful programs are those that structure and systematize their instructional designs. . . . These programs individualize instructional plans to reflect learner strengths and to address learner deficiencies" (Lerche, p. 101).

Although acknowledging that there were many ways to teach literacy, Lerche recommended that learners be involved in the decision-making process and provided with opportunities to apply newly acquired skills. However, the diversity of the sample caused Lerche to conclude that it was not appropriate or feasible to recommend "a single design for all literacy programs, because the philosophy, 'sector,' goals, and nature of the student population all would influence the planning of the individual programs" (Newman & Berverstock, 1990, p. 134).

Darkenwald (1986) reached a similar conclusion in his research synthesis of effective approaches to teaching basic skills. Moreover, he ascertained that the three broad models that comprised contemporary practice in adult literacy education were competency-based education, tutorial approaches, and community-based approaches. Within those models, specific techniques such as programmed instruction, language experience approach, computer-assisted instruction, and theme-based instruction, among others, were subsumed. The models used in basic skills instruction were thus fairly eclectic.

A number of national studies focused on particular instructional models. For example, the Association for Community Based Education conducted a study in 1986. One of the key goals was to provide descriptions of the "noteworthy features of community-based programs" (p. 17). The primary modes of data collection were a survey of 90 community-based literacy providers and follow-up phone interviews with 29 of them. As in the other studies, the researchers found a diversity of instructional approaches and techniques. Because this study focused on community-based education, there was an emphasis on participatory, learner-centered approaches that stressed group-oriented methods and encouraged peer teaching and learning.

In 1994, Young et al. conducted a national evaluation of the federal adult literacy program funded by the Adult Education Act. Although comprehensive in scope, it also sought to assess the extent to which competency-based adult education (CBAE) was being implemented within states. CBAE is a model that, in theory, is rooted in the realities and interests of the learners. Instructional components are organized around the existing competencies and goals of the learner. Theoretically, students can play a major role in defining the competencies they want to achieve and the way in which they will do so. As Fingeret (1989) notes, however, "In practice, competency-based programs tend to judge adults' existing skills by a predefined list that reflects the activities deemed most necessary for those whose goal is to live among or be subservient to the middle class and to conduct their lives as the middle class thinks it is correct for them to conduct their lives" (p. 8).

In the Young study, 75 percent of the teachers and project directors believed that competency-based instruction had a role to play in adult literacy education, but only 23 percent said it should be the sole focus of their adult literacy program. Young's findings reflect a variety of approaches to adult literacy instruction. A majority of teachers said that they adapted their instructional strategies to the pace of individual participants. Close to 50 percent said they worked predominantly in an individualized setting, and almost 20 percent worked mainly with groups. Yet 60 percent of the teachers said they used tutors extensively, and 47 percent reported that at times they grouped participants by ability or interests.

In her state-level study of literacy programs in Michigan, Gadsden (1988) also found variation in instructional practice. Among her findings is the widespread use of commercially published materials as the primary source of curricula, as well as the more traditional word recognition/discrete skill approaches to literacy instruction. Teachers who use the word recognition/discrete skill approach use a phonetic approach to teaching reading. In addition, "to the degree that comprehension skills are stressed, they focus on main ideas, inferences, cause/effect, drawing conclusions, understanding mood, atmosphere, and opinion versus fact" (p. 38). In a student-centered, whole language approach, texts that are meaningful to the learners are used. Furthermore, "the vocabulary, sentence structure, and context are the student's creations" (p. 41). Gadsden provides vivid descriptions of the differences in teaching methodology between the two approaches.

One of Gadsden's most important speculations is related to the comparison of the staffing patterns and program philosophies of two contrasting programs. A program in which discrete-skills instruction was prevalent had a high teacher turnover. All teachers the researcher observed were new and had received no training beyond receiving the Laubach training manual. In short, they were learning to teach as they taught. The program, in which instruction was based on whole language, had a dynamic program director, and the teachers were full-time employees who had been with the program from two to four years. They had access to university-based research and used those resources. The director and teachers had developed the instructional program together. Gadsden concluded that the program's real strength was the positive and trusting relationships among the staff and between the learners and staff. We can also infer from Gadsden's conclusions that it takes planning, training, and staff longevity to implement practices based on sound theories of literacy instruction that are not geared only to discrete skills and gleaned from workbooks.

While Gadsden's work focused on the state level, Koen (1986) set out to describe and analyze the types of curricular and instructional approaches used in

adult literacy programs in New York City. In doing so, the study highlighted the lack of philosophical underpinnings in literacy programs. Using random sampling, the researchers selected 16 programs representative of the three major types of literacy providers in New York City: community-based organizations, the City University of New York, and the New York City Board of Education. A semistructured interview protocol was developed to gather information from one administrator and two teachers per program about general and specific curricular and instructional features. Although Koen found no major variations among the programs studied, community-based programs used less phonics and more authentic types of materials than the other program types. A key finding of this study was the absence of a defined educational philosophy in the majority of adult literacy programs. Although respondents tended to provide conceptual definitions of curriculum, "their own curriculum seemed to be quite specific and skills-oriented" (p. 16). Moreover, there was a high degree of inconsistency between administrators' and teachers' views of curricular practices.

Some of the case studies conducted provide richer illustrations of classroom practice than the larger studies, although generalizing from the case studies is limited. Collins (1992) sought to identify effective literacy practices using criteria established by teachers and learners. Her sample consisted of six classrooms housed within two community college adult literacy education programs. Using grounded theory methodology, Collins implemented a multi-method plan for data collection that used participant observation, interviewing, and document analysis. In all but one of the classes she observed, discrete skills–building instruction predominated.

The exception in Collins' study was a writing class in which whole language methodology was employed and communication skills were enhanced through examination of personal and social issues. In all cases, however, "teachers selected which skills would be taught based on their own experience, their perception of student goals and abilities, and available materials" (p. 71). The four teachers who informed the study were reluctant to identify specific classroom strategies or materials as effective. Nevertheless, teachers and learners frequently cited teacher communication and a supportive class environment as essential elements of effective practice. Collins concluded:

> Effective instructional methods include an instructional process that balanced properties in the teacher's abilities, student goals and needs, and available resources to facilitate learning in an adult literacy class. Classes that were not as effective appeared to lack a balance between these properties, which hampered student progress. (p. 85)

Tardiness was constant in all the classes Collins observed. She described how teachers accommodated latecomers by implementing such activities as individual silent reading or games in which latecomers could participate with little preparation. In some of the classes, students were consistently uninvolved and exhibited such behaviors as participating in discussions unrelated to the subject of instruction, leaving early, and displaying no interest in the course material. These latter findings are similar to those of Mezirow et al. (1975).

Collins noted that "class culture may develop in ABE as a result of students remaining in the same section with the same teacher for a number of terms" (p. 81). This conjecture is based on her experience in interviewing students for this study. When asked about what types of materials they would like to read, some had no response, but others could offer numerous suggestions about materials and topics. Of the six classes observed, four contained students and teachers who had worked together continuously for three semesters. Not only could new students ease into established patterns and values in these classes, but participation in the selection of materials was encouraged. Therefore, students could discuss their learning in more expansive terms. This last finding has implications for the open entry/open exit norms of adult literacy education as well as the time limits placed on student participation as a result of welfare reform and other adult literacy education policies.

In another case study, Fingeret and Danin (1991) addressed the impact of participation in Literacy Volunteers of New York City (LVNYC). The authors examined the dynamics and differing goals of adult literacy teachers and learners. In addition, their study described classroom instructional practices. The general pattern of reading instruction involved silent or oral reading, followed by a short discussion, then some writing also followed by discussion. When questioning students about what they had read, tutors primarily asked literal questions that reflected their own schooling experiences. Reading instruction was not dominated by workbooks, but by what the researchers called "real" books. Consequently, much of LVNYC's approach to reading as well as writing instruction focused on meaning and communication. For example, while reviewing a student's piece of writing, the tutor stressed context over technical skills, saying, "It's not clear to me what you wanted to say here" (p. 75).

The researchers also described some of the tensions within the program. For example, the LVNYC staff considered sustained silent reading preferable to oral reading because it mirrored authentic reading behaviors. But students consistently told "stories about tutors who sit and read silently while the students struggle to figure out why they are supposed to think that this will help them learn" (p. 72). To respond to student frustration, many tutors integrated oral reading into their

methodology, and the researchers observed a high level of learner-to-learner interaction during these episodes. The same strain existed among staff, tutors, and learners concerning integration into the curricula of such discrete skills as phonemic awareness. When the researchers questioned the LVNYC staff about the seemingly inflexible nature of their recommended instructional methodologies, it became clear that many tutors had "interpreted their training to imply more rigid postures" (p. 72) than the staff advocated. The experience of the LVNYC program echoes Gadsden's findings (1988) about the difficulty of implementing a sound instructional program based on a particular ideology. Fingeret and Danin's study addressed issues encountered in a small group-tutoring volunteer program in which paid administrative staff steadfastly wanted to implement participatory instructional programs.

Several case studies have examined the application of participatory literacy education (Pruyn, 1996; Reumann, 1995; Campbell, 1994; Whiton, 1990; Jurmo, 1987). Jurmo's study offered an overview, including the strengths and limitations of learner participation practices in adult literacy programs in the United States. He provided six case studies taken primarily from interview data. He described the literacy programs' participatory structures, such as student committees and self-assessment initiatives. Much of the instruction in these programs was theme-based; learners provided input into the curriculum and their culture, and experiences and needs were key to developing instruction. All of the programs used innovative approaches to writing, such as process writing, dialogue journals, and publishing. In addition to building the reading and writing skills of participants, enabling learners to evolve their voice is central to the instructional components of participatory programs.

Other studies point out that application of participatory education does not always occur as theory might suggest. Reumann (1995), quoting Martin, used the metaphor "literacy as voice," describing "a voice honed through talking, reading, and writing with others and then spoken to the rest of the world, changing the store of knowledge all of us draw on in shaping our perceptions" (p. 256). In her study of a community-based organization, the development of voice sometimes meant that learners insisted on more traditional ways of teaching. For example, some learners expected the teacher to "red pencil" the entries in their writing journals and to focus more on discrete skills. This was apparent in many of the studies of participatory practices.

Pruyn (1996) conducted discourse analysis through a critical pedagogical lens in several Spanish literacy classes. Although the programs claimed to be based on a Freirian model, instruction was primarily traditional. Several learners became

involved in community activism, but real change occurred with the development of academic skills. Pruyn concluded:

> . . . the development of academic critical agency may help students read the word of the literacy classroom, but will it help them significantly in reading the world? . . . I have come to agree with Daisy [one of the teachers] when she said for her, small changes, within the classroom context—often occurring just within individuals—are transformational." (p. 156)

In a NCSALL-sponsored study (Purcell-Gates, Degener, & Jacobson, 1998), Purcell-Gates set out to ascertain the relationship between dialogic "Freierian" adult literacy education and at-home reading activity. In the first phase of the study, the researchers generated a typology of adult literacy program practice along two dimensions. The relevance-of-materials dimension had a four-item continuum that ranged from highly life-contextualized classroom instruction strongly focused on authentic materials that were pertinent to learners' lives and reflected their needs, to highly life-decontextualized instruction, in which programs had a set curriculum focused solely on discrete skills.

Dialogic/monologic, the second dimension on which programs were typed, also had a four-item continuum. The range was from highly dialogic, where students had major input in choosing materials, deciding on class structure, and determining class rules, to highly monologic, where students had little or no input. The researchers then integrated these two dimensions to form four categories into which adult literacy programs were assessed to fit: life-contextual/dialogic, life-decontextual/dialogic, life-contextual/monologic, and life-decontextual/monologic. Of the 271 adult literacy programs from 42 states that responded to a one-page, nine-item questionnaire, 73 percent used materials that were not connected to the lives of students.

The final report of the project (Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson, & Soler, 2000) presented the results of a quantitative analysis of the relationships between dialogic adult literacy and in-home reading activity. Although the researchers were unable to confirm that dialogic teaching methods resulted in increased at-home reading activity for learners, a positive and significant relationship was found between the use of authentic reading materials in class and at-home reading activity.

A review of the empirical literature focused on classroom behavior and instruction in adult literacy education fails to reveal conclusive patterns. Most of the large-scale quantitative studies employing surveys or focused interviews for data collection are primarily descriptive and do not contribute substantially to the development of theory or deep understanding. Although many studies portray

instruction as primarily focused on discrete basic skills development, other studies such as those of Jurmo (1987), Collins (1992), and Purcell-Gates, Degener, & Jacobson (1998) suggest that other, more participatory forms of instruction can also be found.

Only two studies, Mezirow, Darkenwald, & Knox (1975) and Collins (1992), are based on classroom observation and focus on classroom dynamics. Both studies agree that instruction is primarily focused on discrete basic skills and the conveyance of factual knowledge. Both also note that traditional classroom norms have been modified to accommodate adult learners, and both studies voice concern for mixed-level, continuous enrollment.

Prescriptive Literature

While the empirical literature on classroom dynamics and instruction focuses on description and analysis of the "what is," the prescriptive literature focuses more on the "what should be." One area that has been discussed extensively in the prescriptive literature is the issue of phonics versus whole language instruction.

Skilled reading is constructive, fluent, strategic, and a lifelong pursuit (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985), and one can infer that fluent writing has similar characteristics. Although it is difficult to argue about the value of these traits, how to instruct learners to become skilled readers and writers has been argued extensively. The argument centers on whether reading instruction—especially beginning reading instruction—should focus on letters or words [i.e. phonics] or on the meaningfulness of text [i.e. whole language]. Chall (1967) has referred to this argument as "The Great Debate."

Phonics instruction draws on the notion that reading must be broken into its smallest components, such as letters or sounds, before children (or new adult readers) can move on to larger components, such as words and sentences. Learning letter–sound relationships provides a decoding formula applicable whenever a new word is encountered. Drill and repetition are generally important components of phonetic instruction (Curtis, 1997). The logic and use of alphabetic principles and systematic decontextualized instruction (Chall, 1967) are central to this method. The role of the teacher is to provide not only direct phonetic instruction, but also focused instruction in discrete skill areas, such as comprehension. Distinguishable reading stages with identifiable ages and grade levels to reach those stages are inherent to the phonetic approach (Chall, 1996).

In contrast, whole language learning focuses on deriving meaning from text. Initial texts generally are drawn from the children's (or new adult readers') own language and related to topics or issues of interest to them. Whole language is process-oriented. Decoding of individual letters or sounds is discouraged (Curtis, 1997). According to Lapp and Flood (1992), whole language is not an instructional method but a philosophy about reading that holds that

> language is a natural phenomenon, and literacy is promoted through natural, purposeful language function. It has as its foundation current knowledge about language development as a constructive, meaning-oriented process in which language is viewed as an authentic, natural, real-world experience, and language learning is perceived as taking place through functional reading and writing situations. (p. 458)

The debate over the two means of viewing literacy instruction continues. Central to our research is how this debate affects adult literacy instruction. It is clear that the phonics/whole language issue has had an impact on the one-to-one adult literacy instruction conducted by volunteer tutors. Laubach Literacy, through its publishing arm, New Reader's Press, has developed a series of phonics-oriented workbooks; they begin with initial consonants and continue with controlled vocabulary stories. Literacy Volunteers of America has a decidedly antiphonetic perspective, and its curricula are based on whole language principles that it calls the "language experience approaches." Each organization conducts tutor training based on its respective philosophy (Gadsden, 1988). Nevertheless, it is not clear how these two views of teaching reading and writing affect the adult literacy instruction practiced in classrooms by professional teachers. In her work in Michigan, Gadsden (1988) found that most of the programs used commercially published materials as the primary source of curricula and that these materials employed word recognition approaches to teach literacy. Only about a quarter of respondents reported using a language experience approach either alone or in conjunction with a word recognition approach.

Recent literature advocates a balance of both strategies in elementary and secondary education (Gambrell & Mazzoni, 1999; Gambrell, Morrow, Neumann, & Pressley, 1999; Curtis, 1997). Grounded in constructivist learning theory, Gambrell and Mazzoni (1999) infer that "the goal of school is to help students learn new meanings in response to new experiences rather than to simply learn the meanings others have created" (p. 14). A set of principles follow from this goal:

> Instruction must be adapted to draw on the needs and strengths of a particular group of learners.

> The teaching of reading and writing should emphasize authentic meaning making experiences, which promote independent reading and writing.
>
> Reading and writing should be taught via multiple methods and texts, which include high-quality literature.
>
> There should be a balance among direct instruction, guided instruction, and independent learning; between meaning making and discrete skill building instructional methods and between teacher-led and student-led discussions.
>
> Grouping strategies should be varied.
>
> Assessment strategies should be varied and inform instruction. (p. 14)

As is readily clear, the above tenets are primarily ideological principles that teachers in general (both K–12 and adult literacy) should adhere to when planning their classes. They are not step-by-step methods.

Other authors have gone beyond tenets to suggest more specific ways to foster adult literacy and learning. In *Many Literacies: Modules for Training Adult Beginning Readers and Tutors*, Marilyn Gillespie (1989) promotes critical reflection for both teachers and learners. What is particularly innovative about this book is that its author is explicit about the empirical research and conceptual theories that underpin the planned activities. In addition, she recommends that teachers facilitate discussions with the learner about these features. The handbook, which contains a myriad of methods and strategies for implementation, is organized into four modules:

1) *Creating a community of learners*: Gillespie suggests that to create a community of learners in the realm of adult literacy, the issue of defining literacy must be confronted. Although she agrees "that literacy means different things to different people depending on their needs and interests, many students believe that literacy is like a door, that is either open or closed" (p. 14). Drawing on the ethnographic work of Heath (1982) and on adult learning theory (Knowles, 1970), Gillespie details exercises that can expand people's conception of literacy to prepare them to read and write or to teach reading and writing. Moreover, there are exercises that help establish an environment in which people can begin the process of thinking about how they will practice their literacy skills.

2) *Developing a learning plan*: Using a case study of typical literacy students and drawing on Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, Gillespie illustrates how to participate in and facilitate goal-setting activities. She infers that these types of

activities are crucial in adult literacy instruction because learners need to develop short- and long-term goals for their literacy studies.

3) *Introducing reading*: Gillespie begins by extracting what research says good readers do from a meaning-based perspective. For example, good readers read for a purpose: to get and create meaning. Drawing on the work of Kenneth and Yetta Goodman (Owen, Goodman, Goodman, & Hood, 1989), the author has created exercises that help learners develop various reading strategies. She provides suggestions on choosing materials that will enable learners to become fluent readers. Furthermore, she delineates some assisted reading strategies for poor readers who "need to begin to gradually approximate what good readers do by being helped with the words so they can read for ideas and get to the meanings being read" (p. 84). In each module, Gillespie stresses the importance of creating an environment for modeling behaviors of good readers. Hence, she recommends establishing ongoing sustained silent reading activities and suggests that the teacher also read silently during that period. In addition, as a means of enabling learners to discuss what they have read, teachers are encouraged to "reflect on its meaning to them, and then refine and clarify their reading strategies and behaviors." (p. 85)

4) *Writing and publishing*: As in the reading module, the author begins with discussion and reflection about what good writers do, framing the discussion around the research of Murray (1968). She espouses a meaning-based, process-oriented approach to writing and shows, through activities and graphics, how content is paramount in the first few drafts of writing and how the importance of mechanics increases during the final drafts. Significantly, Gillespie does not name this final module "writing" but rather calls it "writing and publishing."

It is important to note several of Gillespie's distinctions. Revising a draft is meaning-based. Writers ask themselves such questions as, "Does this make sense? Are the ideas clear? Do I need to add anything or take something out?" During the editing stage, content revision has already taken place, and the writer is dealing with structural issues, such as grammar and spelling. Another important distinction is between a topic and a theme. Reluctant readers—as many of the adult learners in basic education classes are—need support in creating and expanding a topic. A topic can be as rudimentary as "I like to play baseball." Gillespie draws from the work of Paulo Freire (1973, 1970), who envisions themes as crucial issues in people's lives. Gillespie discusses ways in which teachers can help learners discover themes in their writing. In this context, there is a strong connection between dialogue and writing. Thematic instruction, visualized in this way, is also at the core of participatory literacy instruction.

Participatory Literacy Education

Like the phonics/whole language debate, participatory literacy education has been a major topic of the prescriptive literature focused on instruction. Participatory literacy education is based on the belief that learners' characteristics, aspirations, backgrounds, needs, and goals should be at the center of literacy instruction (Fingeret, 1992; Beder, 1991; Fingeret & Jurmo, 1989; Beder, 1991; Fingeret, 1989). This challenges the deficit model of teaching adult literacy, which assumes that learners' lack of literacy is a social deficiency that must be remedied with teacher-prescribed treatment (Beder, 1991). The participatory model also contests the banking concept of education (Freire, 1973, 1970), which casts learners as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge and skills. Moreover, participatory literacy education is much more than a set of instructional practices; it is a philosophy that challenges the status quo. In theory, learners should have as much control of and responsibility for all aspects of the literacy programs as the professionals working with them. Community-based and other nontraditional literacy programs are generally proponents of this model (Association for Community Based Education, 1986).

It is essential to participatory literacy education that issues important to learners' lives are incorporated into the curricula (Dirkx & Prenger, 1997; Sissel, 1996; Reumann, 1995; Gaber-Katz & Watson, 1991; Fingeret & Jurmo, 1989; Association for Community Based Education, 1988; Freire, 1973, 1970). According to Auerbach (1993), however, participatory literacy education involves much more than organizing curricula around learner interests and changing teacher–learner interactions and roles at the program level. Rather, it is grounded in social change and inherently political. Auerbach asserts that the terms learner-centered and participatory are used interchangeably, despite their distinct ideological differences. Participatory literacy education's key tenet is that marginalized people can only affect change in their lives by participating in collective critical reflection and action. Auerbach fears that participatory education has become a buzzword as meaningless as learner-centered because its inherently political nature has been obscured. Despite the good intentions of many practitioners, application of participatory literacy education to classroom practice varies substantially.

Adult Education and Learning Theory

Although there are many competing theories of adult learning (Elias & Merriam, 1980), Knowles' theory of andragogy has had particular influence on instruction in adult education. In its simplest form, andragogy is the "art and science of helping adults learn" (Knowles, 1984, p. 6). According to Knowles (1970), there are four

assumptions that undergird andragogy and differentiate it from the traditional pedagogical model used in elementary and secondary education.

> These assumptions are that as a person matures, 1) his self-concept moves from being a dependent personality to one of being a self-directed human being; 2) he accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning; 3) his readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of his social roles; and 4) his time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly his orientation to learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of problem-centeredness. (p. 39)

Knowles (1970) asserts that adults are socially and psychologically independent and, therefore, can and should take responsibility for their own learning. Because adults have a wealth of life experience, experience should be the foundation of instruction. Learning should be oriented toward solving the adults' role-related problems, such as those associated with being a parent or worker. These problems generally require timely solutions, so learning can be applied immediately. In the andragogical model, teachers serve as facilitators rather than functioning as conveyors of knowledge and planners of instruction.

Brookfield (1986) affirms that adult education teachers and trainers generally refer to themselves as facilitators and view "themselves as resources for learning, rather than as didactic instructors who have all of the answers" (p. 63). Hence, "responsibility for setting the direction and methods of learning rests as much with the learner as with the educator" (p. 63). The adult education literature (Dirkx & Prenger, 1997; Schwarz, 1994; Brookfield, 1986; Brockett, 1983; Tough, 1979) describes facilitation in ways that distinguish it from the process of teaching children. For example, facilitators participate in dialogue with learners whom they view as their equals (Brookfield, 1986; Tough, 1979), have no sole decision-making power within a group, and take a neutral stance (Schwarz, 1994). In addition, facilitators are expected to be unobtrusive, and "insights and learning flow naturally from the interaction among learners with minimal direction from the facilitator" (Zachariades, 1988). Those who draw on the work of Freire (1973, 1970) view the role of the facilitator as promoting problem-posing education in which the teacher's questioning stance involves being a resource to learners, but not providing the answer (Auerbach, 1997; Reumann, 1995; Wallerstein, 1983).

Another popular prescriptive theory of adult learning is transformative education (Mezirow, 1981, 1991). Its primary goal is to explicitly challenge the beliefs of learners "to free them from forces that limit their options and control over

their lives, forces that they have taken for granted or seen as beyond their control" (Imel, 1995, p. 1). Although transformative education entails critical thinking and reflection, it is not necessarily connected to social action.

A theory that is similar to transformative education but does entail social action is the emancipatory literacy outlined by Freire and Macedo (1987). As Beder (1991) explains:

> In this tradition, literacy is seen as one of the mechanisms through which adults come to understand their world and, through the process of becoming literate, become empowered to act rather than being acted upon. While most other approaches to literacy concentrate on individual gain, emancipatory literacy focuses on social transformation—the elimination of dominant class hegemony and oppression. As Freire and Macedo state, "In this view, literacy programs should be tied not only to mechanical learning of literacy skills but, additionally to a critical understanding of the overall goals for national reconstruction. Thus the reader's development of a critical comprehension of the text, and the sociohistorical context to which it refers, becomes an important factor in our notion of literacy." (p. 3)

A major issue for adult education theory is whether teaching adults is distinct from teaching children. The literature is contradictory and, therefore, inconclusive (Imel, 1995). For example, Mezirow (1991) states that only adults can participate in transformative learning because "the formative learning of childhood becomes transformative in adulthood" (p. 3). However, Merriam and Caffarella (1991) challenge that claim, suggesting that differences between adult and children's learning are less pronounced than we might assume. Furthermore, in a 1984 revision of his 1971 work, Knowles (1984) stated that he no longer viewed andragogy and pedagogy as dichotomous. He stated that teachers of adults and children often use the same techniques.

> . . . a number of teachers in elementary, secondary and higher education who had somehow been exposed to the andragogical model . . . had experimented with applying (or adapting) the model in their practice and had found that young people learned better, too, when the adragogical model was applied. On the other hand, many teachers and trainers working with adults cited circumstances—especially in basic skills training—where the pedagogical model seemed to be required. (p. 6)

In her examination of adult education, Imel (1995) concludes that teaching adults is at times different from teaching children, and at other times, it is not. Donaldson, Flannery, and Ross-Gordon (1993) state that it is crucial "to concentrate on the particular attributes which adults consistently select as important for effective teaching" (p. 150). Some of these attributes are the ability to create a comfortable learning atmosphere, use a variety of techniques, and adapt to meet diverse needs of

the students. Imel (1995) asks, "Should teaching adults be different?" (p. 3). She replies that it depends "upon the purpose of the teaching-learning situation, including what approach and methods seem to be appropriate, as well as the needs of the learners" (p. 3).

Examining practitioners' perspectives on this subject, Beder and Darkenwald (1982) found that adult education teachers consistently differentiate between teaching adults and children. The authors asked teachers who taught both adults and traditional-age students whether their teaching behavior differed depending on the age of the learners. Respondents reported using more andragogical teaching techniques with adults and indicated that their teaching behavior was informed by the age of the learners. Collins (1992), in her descriptive case study of two urban adult literacy classrooms, determined that teachers viewed learners as adults whose prior knowledge and experience has to be recognized and drawn upon for instructional purposes. Additionally, teachers differentiated between the educational needs of adults and children. Prescriptive adult education theory thus suggests that teaching and learning in adult basic education classes is, and should be, substantially different than that which occurs in elementary and secondary education contexts.

While much of the empirical research on adult literacy education suggests that instruction is predominantly oriented toward development of discrete basic skills and conveyance of factual information, most of the prescriptive literature and theory advocate something quite different. As a context for our study, current theory suggests that adult literacy education is characterized by a number of elements: a focus on meaning rather than the conveyance of factual information; involvement of learners in decision making rather than placing control solely in the hands of teachers; instruction based on learners' experience rather than standardized, predetermined curricula; and helping learners transform their lives and society rather than merely code and decode text.

Literature on Elementary Education

Evolution of Classroom Interaction Research

As mentioned earlier, we found the elementary education classroom observation literature conducted in the tradition of Mehan (1979) quite relevant to our own work, probably because most teachers in our study had been trained as K–12 teachers and had worked in K–12 education. To understand current K–12 classroom interaction research, it is useful to explain how classroom interaction was approached before the mid-1970s. According to a review of research conducted by Dunkin and Biddle (1974), K–12 classroom research was dominated by studies that quantified the

frequency of various patterns. Although the categories varied from scheme to scheme, the data gathering and analysis procedures were similar. Data collectors were provided with a set of categories, which they would use to simultaneously observe and code teacher and student behavior. The data were tallied at frequent and recurrent intervals and produced "a tabulation of the occurrences of certain categories of classroom behavior" (Mehan, 1979, p. 10).

Inherent in these research schemes was the notion that classroom interaction was fairly static. According to Dunkin and Biddle (1974), in the quantifiable research schemes, a student's responsibility was simply to respond when called upon. These studies viewed the teacher–student relationship as didactic, with the focus primarily on the teacher rather than the full range of interactions among teachers and students. In his critique of this body of research, Mehan (1979) stated that even in traditional classrooms, question-answer exchanges are elaborate interactional processes that teachers and students construct together. They become even more complex in student-centered classrooms, team-teaching arrangements, and learning labs. The interconnected nature of the verbal and nonverbal teacher–student interaction is needed to understand the intricate nature of the classroom. According to Bloome and Theodorou (1988), Dunkin and Biddle's findings "initiated a reconceptualization of classroom dynamics by insisting that research account for the realities of classrooms" (p. 218).

One of the studies that attempted to do just that was Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) investigation of language used in classrooms in England. They found two forms of exchange in the classroom: boundary and teaching. The function of a boundary exchange was "to signal the beginning or end of what the teacher considers to be a stage in the lesson" (p. 49). There were two categories of boundary exchanges: framing and focusing. A framing exchange took place when the teacher indicated a lesson had ended and another was beginning. A focusing move, which generally followed a framing interaction, told students what was going to happen or what had happened. The researchers noted, "Teaching exchanges are the individual steps by which the session progresses" (p. 49). These exchanges were characterized as opening, answering, and follow-up. There were seven elements that comprised the boundary and teaching exchanges: elicit, direct, inform, reinitiate, check, repeat, and list.

One of the more interesting observations by Sinclair and Coulthard was the unique function of teacher elicitation and the need for a follow-up interaction by the teacher. They stated that outside the classroom, a person who asked a question generally did not know the answer to that question. However, a question in the classroom functioned as a means for a teacher—who already knew the answer—to

get a correct response. Once a response was given, students wanted to know whether it was correct. The researchers' data illustrated that a new instructor, after eliciting information, deliberately withheld feedback once the children had answered "to suggest to them that there aren't always right answers" (p. 51). Witholding feedback, however, reduced the children to silence because they could not see the point to his questions. The researchers, therefore, concluded that feedback is a compulsory element of the teacher elicitation.

Although Sinclair and Coulthard's work has been influential, Stefano, Pepinsky, and Sanders (1982) assert that their model is primarily an academic interaction framework and has just two categories for student exchanges: pupil elicit and pupil inform. It was Mehan's study (1979) of teacher–student interaction in the classroom that in many ways transformed the field of classroom interaction research. It provided a comprehensive view of the interactions that transpire during classroom lessons.

Initiate, Reply, Evaluate (IRE)

The setting of Mehan's study was a combined first-, second-, and third-grade classroom in an inner-city neighborhood of San Diego. The teacher observed was a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education who had returned to the elementary school classroom to put into practice the ideas about child language and education she had been teaching and writing about and to contemplate questions for future research (Cazden, 1988). During the first week of school, the first hour's activities were videotaped daily. These activities were then videotaped for an hour a day during the third week of several months. To investigate teacher–student interaction in both formal and nonformal activities, the first hour of the day was chosen because it had the best mix of academic and procedural activities. The primary findings of the study were based on detailed analyses of nine videotaped lessons.

A key element of the analyses was the structure of classroom lessons. "The teacher and students engage in recurrent interactional activity that serves to mark off the lesson from other classroom events" (Mehan, 1979, p. 36), causing the social organization of lessons generally to begin well before their formal opening. Once activities were set, they typically were organized sequentially into opening, instructional, and closing phases.

> The work of organizing, conducting, and closing lessons is accomplished by and revealed in the verbal and nonverbal behavior of lesson participants. More specifically, teacher and student behavior is organized into "interactional sequences," which perform distinctive functions in specific places in the

> organization of the lessons. Directive and informative sequences contribute to the assembly of opening and closing phases, while the instructional phase is composed primarily of elicitation sequences. (p. 36)

For example, during the opening phase, information was provided about the upcoming lesson, and students were physically rearranged to prepare for instruction. The ensuing instructional phase was marked by the exchange of information. The participants exchanged "factual information, opinions, interpretations of academic materials, and the grounds for reasoning" (p. 41). The closing phase was a mirror image of the opening one, except that teachers and students formulated not what they were going to do but what had been done. The three-part sequence of teacher initiation, student response, teacher evaluation (IRE) was the most common pattern of classroom talk in all phases of the lessons, Mehan observed. Nevertheless, IRE was most prevalent in teacher-led lessons, during which the teacher controlled student turn-taking and topic development.

Mehan characterized lessons as "sequences of questions and answers, questions asked by the teacher, answers provided by the students" (p. 41). Although most questions generally began with words such as what, which, who, where, and how and were spoken with rising intonation at the end of the sentence, Mehan chose not to focus on grammatical structure. Rather, he analyzed the language used during classroom interaction from the perspective of the function it played during a lesson.

Following most lessons, Mehan noted a series of teacher-posed questions and student responses, the primary function of which was to elicit information. Mehan located four distinct types of elicitations:

> 1) Choice elicitation dictates the student to agree or disagree with a statement provided by the teacher; 2) product elicitation requires students to provide factual responses; 3) process elicitation calls for students' opinions or interpretations; 4) metaprocess elicitation asks students to reflect upon the process of making connections between elicitations and responses; "to formulate the grounds of their reasoning." (p. 46)

Choice and product elicitations were the most frequent. Only one percent of the elicitations initiated by the teacher was of the metaprocess type.

Yet the IRE sequence was more than a set of different forms of elicitations. There were often extended sequences of interaction. When students did not respond to the teacher's questions, for example, or gave incomplete or incorrect answers, the teacher responded with such strategies as prompting incorrect or incomplete replies, repeating the question, or simplifying the question until the expected response was

provided. Often, when a student did not answer correctly, the teacher asked other students to help.

Although Mehan's work focused on both teacher and student interactions, the roles of the teacher and students were asymmetrical. Although students contributed to the lesson's direction and coherence, the teacher made decisions about establishing a common understanding of lesson content, maintaining direction of the lesson, and insuring "academic and social coherence of the lesson text on a moment-by-moment basis" (Green, Weade, & Graham 1988, p. 14).

Mehan's findings have been confirmed by numerous studies. According to Dillon (1990), the preponderance of teacher-generated questions and the paucity of student talk has been confirmed by many other researchers. Bloome and Theodorou (1988) affirm that many studies in the fields of sociolinguistic ethnography, ethnomethodology, and educational psychology "have arrived at a similar conception of classrooms as group or collective settings within which communicative and social processes provide a context for academic and/or cognitive processes" (p. 218). Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz (1992) address the importance of Mehan's study to classroom research.

> School discourse is evaluative, as a study by Mehan has shown. Since the business of schooling is to learn, integral to all discourse messages is an evaluative component. For this reason, teacher talk appears to avoid the ambiguities and implicit meanings that everyday talk and discourse outside of the classroom relies upon. Mehan's isolation of the initiation-response-evaluation sequence characteristic of teacher talk has far-reaching implications for understanding not only sequences of classroom talk, but also the nature of schooling as a sociolinguistic process. This is a good example of the way that sociolinguistic research has shown that what is to be learned is often secondary to the way the information is presented. . . . (p. 166)

Conclusion

Had we reviewed Mehan's study before beginning our study, we might have dismissed this work as irrelevant to a study of adult literacy education. After all, Mehan presents a picture that differs substantially from adult education theory and the prescriptive literature of adult literacy education. Although some of the empirical literature of adult literacy education refers to the prevalence of discrete basic skills instruction, Mehan's work refines and elaborates on the basic skills concept in a very substantial way. The relevance of Mehan's work to our study will become immediately apparent to the reader in Chapter Four, The Structure and Content of Instruction.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH CONTEXT

The Setting

As noted previously, the classes we selected for study were chosen to maximize diversity. They were conducted in a wide range of settings, including public schools, community colleges, libraries, community centers, churches, and workplaces. Class types included all levels of basic, family, and workplace literacy. Classes were located in urban, suburban, and rural areas in eight different states.

In evening adult literacy classes situated in public schools, classrooms were typically arranged to suit the teachers who taught during the day and had authority over how the classroom was arranged. This sometimes posed problems for the adult literacy teacher. For example, in one classroom used for a Spanish class during the day, the Spanish teacher did not want the blackboard erased. Consequently, the adult literacy teacher was restricted to a small corner of the blackboard for use in her own class.

In daytime adult literacy classes, the classroom was typically used exclusively for adults. In these rooms, there was a tendency to display such artifacts as posters of adult role models, notices of upcoming events, health and community information, and samples of learners' work. One classroom displayed pictures of past graduates, and another had a learner honor roll posted on the bulletin board. Instructional materials, such as maps and grammar charts, were also often on exhibit.

Although seating in some classrooms was arranged in rows, tables that were sometimes scattered and sometimes organized into "U" or similar shapes were more typical. Nearly all classrooms contained a teachers' desk, typically placed at the head of the seating arrangement. Most classes had a file cabinet or bookcase with instructional materials and learners' folders. All the rooms we observed had a blackboard or large notepad on which an outline of the day's activities was sometimes written at the beginning of the class. Learners used computers in about one quarter of the classes we observed. In some instances, the computer was located in the classroom; in others, learners had access to a computer laboratory.

Many teachers tried to create a comfortable classroom ambience. In about a quarter of the classes we observed, coffee, tea, and pastries were available, and learners were generally given breaks, especially in the longer classes. One teacher had brought several plants into the classroom to, as she told us, "create a more adult atmosphere." Another classroom was decorated with bright baskets of plastic flowers. Although one classroom was described by one of our data collectors as

dreary and old, this was the exception. Most commonly, classrooms were described by observers as pleasant places.

Learners

The learners we observed represent a diversity of ages and backgrounds. Although most learners were in their late 20s to late 30s, learners overall ranged in age from their late teens to what appeared to be their 60s or 70s. In California and the Northeast, large proportions of adult literacy learners were foreign-born, whereas in other parts of the country, learners were more likely to be native-born Caucasians, Blacks, and Hispanics. In welfare-funded and family literacy classes, females predominated, but gender was mixed in the other classes.

Learners also varied in terms of their dress. Although most wore casual dress, such as jeans, sneakers, sweatshirts, and tee shirts, in some instances, learners were described as wearing more formal work attire. In other instances, learners wore ethnic clothing typical of their home countries. Several of the younger learners were described by the observers as being dressed in hip-hop style.

Teachers

Eighteen of the 20 adult literacy teachers who took part in our study were female, and most worked part-time. About two fifths had between two and five years of experience, and about two fifths had 10 or more years of experience as adult literacy teachers. One teacher had 28 years of part-time experience in adult literacy, and another had 19 years of full-time experience. Based on our observations, most appeared to have come from middle-class backgrounds. One teacher was Hispanic, one was Black, and the rest were Caucasian.

Most of our data on teachers is derived from teacher interviews conducted between the first and second observations. In these interviews, teachers talked primarily about what they had set out to accomplish in the class we observed, their learners, and the challenges they faced in teaching.

Teachers revealed a variety of objectives and experiences. Some responded with very detailed and reflective accounts of their teaching, clearly articulating their rationales for virtually every action they took in the observed class. In other cases, teachers' responses were more brief, and their rationales were less clear and elaborate. Although some of this variation can be attributed to differences in interviewer style and teacher personality, it is also likely that teachers vary in how deeply and systematically they reflect on their teaching.

What Teachers Try To Accomplish

Meeting Learners' Needs

By far, teachers' most commonly expressed goal was to meet learners' needs. Most teachers believed that learners' needs were diverse, and most knew a good deal about their learners from information supplied by counselors at intake, from biographical writing assignments, from pre- or post-class conversations, and—in some cases—from class discussion.

Teachers attempted to meet learners' needs in three ways. In the first, which was by far the most common, they designed lessons focused on basic skills acquisition and delivered them with the apparent expectation that the content would meet learners' needs in a broad and general sense. In such cases, there was no evidence that instruction had been organized around the expressed or otherwise identified needs of a specific learner or group of learners.

In the second approach to meeting learner needs, used only in a minority of cases, an individual learner's needs sometimes became the focus of instruction for the entire class, the implicit assumption being that if one learner had a need, other learners probably had the same need. Below, one teacher explains how her teaching was guided by one student's request and the Christmas shopping season.

> *Teacher:* Well, what happened [in the class you observed] is one of the students got a job in a department store. You knew that.
> *Interviewer:* Yes, I remember that.
> *Teacher:* And she [the student] said, "I need to know how to do percentage right away." So she said, "Could you teach me tomorrow?" So I said, "I'll not only teach you, but I think everybody needs to know because we're all going to be shopping for Christmas, and there may be sales in the stores." So I thought everybody needed it. So I went through the Sunday paper and found these. That's the day I had those ads with the percentage-off sales.
> *Interviewer:* So the teaching was just based on what a student had expressed a need for?
> *Teacher:* Yes, and that's really the kind of way I teach. Like, I teach what they want to learn. If somebody needs to learn something immediately to help their child with homework in math, we'll do that concept so they can go home that night and help.

In a very few cases, teachers took a third type of approach to meeting learner needs, taking time from planned lessons to individualize instruction to an expressed learner need. Such was the case when a teacher abandoned her planned grammar lesson to help a student who needed to learn how to complete a job application.

> There are different facets of this course, like job skills. Help with, like, interviewing and writing a resume. When the older student expressed an obvious need right that day, saying he had gone out on a job interview, I took the time to push the grammar off, and we filled out a job application. He was lacking the ability to use the phone book. The student saw the use of the phone book as "magic." I also helped him track down his old job's phone number for a letter of reference. This made his application more weighty. Here is a man who held a job for 14 years but lacked the skills to present himself on paper.

Although the goal of meeting learners' needs was very common, it was clear from our observations that, in most cases, the basis for identifying learners' needs was teachers' own supposition. In only four classes did we observe teachers systematically and routinely asking learners to identify their needs, and rarely did we observe teachers asking learners whether the instruction was meeting their personal needs.

Developing Life Skills

Some of the teachers who placed an emphasis on meeting learners' needs also emphasized teaching life skills. In most cases, life skills instruction took the form of reading, writing, or math lessons that used authentic materials and stressed practical, "real life" applications. In one case, a teacher used tax forms to teach math, and in another, the teacher used map legends to teach learners how to compute distances. In the following example, the teacher begins with a lesson on stress, then shifts into a lesson on budgeting.

> I think that during one of the first cycles I had a theme about stress. I was going through a lot of stress myself, and I imagine people deal with a lot of stress everyday, and I said, "Well, how about budgets? There's some stress in making budgets for yourself." So we had a whole unit on budgets, and from that we went into you can have less stress figuring out a budget and going shopping, and then we decided on coupons. So we had a good discussion on coupons, how many people use coupons, and why are coupons a good deal and how much money do you save, and how do you use coupons when you are trying to figure out your budget.

Fostering a Learning Atmosphere

Nearly all the teachers we interviewed told us that one of their important objectives was to establish a trusting, respectful, and emotionally comfortable classroom atmosphere conducive to learning. The importance of a positive learning climate was echoed by a teacher of a family literacy class.

> Well, you know, I just try and build up a lot of trust. You know, when I come in, I just explain that I can understand how difficult it is for them not having been in school for all these years and what it means to be in the classroom. How courageous they are to do that. With families and problems with all the situations they have had before I said, "This is also a place where I want you to feel safe. That there's no wrong answer in terms of your opinion or your feelings. That I'm not interested in the right answer, I'm just interested in helping you achieve what you want to achieve." I also try to explain that everybody is at a different level and that everybody needs to respect everybody else. It's constantly, constantly, constantly. You know, like I do with my daughter. Just to build self-confidence and to build trust.

That teachers emphasize creating a relaxed, trustful, and emotionally safe classroom atmosphere is corroborated by our observational data, which shows consistent use of verbal praise, an absence of negative sanctioning, and considerable tolerance for tuning-out behavior and tardiness. This emphasis is linked to teachers' perhaps well-founded belief that such an atmosphere enhances learners' participation and learning and reduces the probability that learners will drop out.

Interesting and Engaging Learners

Just as teachers believed that a positive learning atmosphere enhanced learners' participation, they felt interesting, relevant, and stimulating lessons engaged learners and promoted participation. For example, in a family literacy class, a teacher who had received a graduate degree in literature used several techniques to interest learners in the reading material.

> Well, I noticed that there's a lot more to a book. If there are any pictures to a book, I always go there because that's important. It's a way in, and also it's aesthetically beautiful, that lithograph, and I thought it could teach her, teach us, a lot about the character, and in fact it seemed to work that way. So it's another way into the book. It also contextualizes it. . . . I was going to do a little more around Alice Walker. I used an essay about Alice Walker, and they've read Alice Walker, so it was sort of emphasizing the legacy of Black women discovering each other . . . and how a book is, how a book works, how a novel works.

Not only did teachers believe that relevant and interesting materials promoted learners' participation and engagement in class, they also hoped that with sufficiently interesting material, learners would read and write more outside class. One teacher shared her thoughts on materials and ways to motivate students.

> Well, I think I'm mostly trying to move them toward being readers and writers. And so the materials that I choose and the writing that I have them do, you know, the

> undercurrent, the motivating thing, is to increase the chances that they'll read on their own time, that they will realize that there's something worthwhile that connects with real life in print. There's a reason to maybe seek it out, that writing can be very helpful at times, and that you can get your message out that way. So, that's my main idea, to affect the affective element, which they usually come in feeling very negatively about reading and writing itself. I want them to feel more positively toward it when they read.

Supporting/Encouraging Independent, Self-Motivated Learners

Several teachers placed particular emphasis on developing independent, self-motivated learners. This was so for the teacher of a highly individualized class in which independent learning was particularly important if learners were to progress.

> One of the things that I do emphasize to people is that I am teaching you to teach yourself. The more you can teach yourself, the faster you will move. What I do tell them is . . . if you teach yourself, you're going to learn faster. It's very simple. But if you have a problem, I tell them to circle it. This is why you want me. If you can move on, fine. Make sure you circle that problem, and we'll go over it. I will go over it and explain to the best of my ability. And if I can't, I'll find out. Umm, but I'm teaching you to teach yourself.

Preparing for the GED Tests

In addition to the commonly expressed goals we have outlined thus far, some teachers also expressed a more instrumental objective of their teaching: to help learners pass the tests of General Educational Development (GED). Earning a GED was a very frequent goal for adult literacy learners, and many of the classes we observed were advertised as GED classes. These were of two types. In some GED classes, either most or all of the learners were at the GED level in terms of skills. In these classes, teachers tended to stress the skills needed to pass the GED tests. In other cases, learners' skill levels were mixed, with some learners at or near the nonreader level. In these classes, discussed below, the teacher either had great difficulty teaching to the GED tests or did not even try to do so.

The most common way teachers helped learners pass the GED tests was by emphasizing material they believed would be on the exams. This knowledge came from using commercially produced materials targeted toward the GED tests and from reviewing GED practice exams. One example came from a teacher who had been teaching a lesson on "fact and opinion."

> *Interviewer*: And fact and opinion, is that something that is required on the GED, or how did you decide to teach that?

Teacher: Umm, for the GED.
Interviewer: So most of what you are teaching, or what you are basically teaching on, is from the GED? That's their goal? Is that right?
Teacher: Yes, exactly.
Interviewer: All right, that's the big prize.

Some GED preparation teachers tested their learners frequently with GED practice tests to reduce testing anxiety and to familiarize learners with the content of the GED tests. One teacher explained her efforts to help students prepare for the GED.

> They get so used to taking the test because I test them every day for a week prior to the actual test. Writing is the first test they take. For both science and social studies, they have to know graphs, charts, and schedules. It is amazing to see how many cannot read a graph. I also reduce anxiety by giving them a copy of the formula page from the actual test, letting them know they do not have to learn them.

In addition, she continues to develop a schedule to train her learners for the test while eliminating test anxiety. Her focus is on keeping math, the subject on which the last test is taken, interwoven throughout 12 weeks. Learners also can track how many points they need by the time the math test occurs.

Teachers' Perceptions of Learners

When teachers talked about their learners, they most commonly talked about learners' problems that affected learning progress and class participation. Teachers were clearly concerned about their learners and the things they believed were constraining learning and progress. Second, teachers' references to learners in the interview were frequently prompted by interviewers' questions about specific learner behavior witnessed during the observation. For this reason, the interview itself may have promoted a focus on learners' problems.

Teachers commonly responded to learners' problems in and out of class with tolerance and acceptance. For example, one teacher felt the problems learners experienced at home justified their tardiness and her acceptance of it.

> They have so many problems at home. See, we have a sign-in sheet, so at the end of the month, I tally up their hours, and then I turn it in to the administration. So if they have not met their criteria for the month, they write them a letter. But, like, I don't even deal with that. I came here to teach. I can't be punitive and all that.

Teachers recognized that the problems learners experienced out of class affected learning within class, as the following example demonstrates.

> She [a learner] has been here over two years. Her first year, the progress was absolutely amazing. She knew the alphabet when she came in—period. Within the first year, she was reading—easy stuff, but she was reading. The progress now is slower . . . her mother was very ill. She was constantly running to the hospital, taking care of her mother.

When teachers were aware that learners were experiencing problems in their daily lives, they sometimes attempted to help in ways that went beyond their teaching duties, as one teacher describes here.

> I had this one older guy in here once. He was here for years. It was such a sad story: He had to take care of his father, who had a stroke and Alzheimer's. The nurse had given up on him, and his father would beat him up. He himself was disabled and couldn't work. Well, he had told everybody—all his neighbors—that he was studying for the GED . . . well, he had to take it, and I knew he wasn't ready, and he couldn't afford to take it. They weren't going to have enough money that week. [I assume he paid the money and took the test.] So that week, I cooked two big casseroles of food. I brought it in to the secretary and told her to tell Joe that I had a big party, and this was left over. I swear he lived on that food for two weeks.

In some cases, teachers recognized that learners had learning problems that they, as teachers, simply could not deal with effectively. To compound this problem, programs in most cases lacked the special education support services that might have made successful intervention possible. For example, in an atmosphere of frustration, our interviewer, the teacher, and a counselor discussed what to do with a new, apparently disabled student.

> *Counselor:* You can tell that this guy's had problems. He has an awfully big scar that goes down his neck, and that is a big part of why he doesn't speak as well as he should.
> *Interviewer:* Do you know anything about his background?
> *Counselor:* He told me that he didn't start school until he came to this country. [I asked] When did you come to this country? Eleven [he said].
> *Teacher:* How old is he now?
> *Counselor:* Twenty-five. He's on SSI. He's not there because of his looks. He needs it because he has some kind of social deficiency, as well as other things. He's disabled. He came up and asked, "How I did?" Well, I said, you need some help. I'm not going to put him down and say "first-grade level," you know.
> *Interviewer:* It's a shame. Can't you refer him to special education? I can't imagine he will benefit from GED or pre-GED.

(Both the teacher and counselor make signs of exasperation.)
Teacher: Oh my dear, I wish. We should be able to [but cannot].

In analyzing teachers' accounts of their learners' problems and their responses, we infer that teachers perceived their learners in several ways. Clearly, most teachers thought of their learners as people whose problems were the consequence of a social environment or psychological disposition. Teachers typically responded with tolerance and expressions of compassion. At the same time, teachers perceived their learners' problems as instructional challenges to analyze and solve to the extent possible. They typically responded with an instructional intervention of one sort or another. Teachers occasionally perceived their learners' problems to be unsolvable and insurmountable, given available resources. In these cases, teachers responded with either resignation or frustration.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE CONTENT AND STRUCTURE OF INSTRUCTION

The classes we observed were, for the most part, characterized by two instructional formats: group-based instruction and individualized instruction. In the group-based format, instruction was delivered to the entire class, although at times some teachers also organized their classes into small groups. With individualized instruction, learners worked by themselves on sequenced, usually commercially produced materials. Fifteen of the 20 classes used group-based instruction exclusively. One class was completely individualized, and four classes employed a mixture of individualized and group-based instruction. By and large, the content of instruction consisted of reading, writing, math, and instruction targeted to the GED tests.

Group-Based Instruction

As we discussed in the literature review, several researchers who have used classroom observation to study elementary and secondary education classrooms (Mehan, 1979) have noted a common pattern. In elementary and secondary education, the structure of instruction typically begins with the teacher opening a lesson with directions and other signals that an instructional activity is about to begin. When the activity has been completed, the teacher elicits information from the learners by asking questions to which they reply. Replies are followed by an evaluation in which the teacher indicates to learners whether their answers are correct or incorrect and then generally bestows praise for correct responses.

In Mehan's study of an elementary education class, teachers' elicitations were typically of four types: choice elicitations, in which the student was asked to agree or disagree with a teacher-provided statement; product elicitations, which required students to provide factual responses; process elicitations, which called for student opinions or interpretations; and metaprocess elicitations, which directed students to reflect and formulate the grounds for their reasoning. Mehan and his followers termed this elicitation structure IRE (Initiation, Reply, Evaluation).

A teacher-prepared lesson followed by IRE was the predominant instructional structure in the classes we observed, regardless of class type or context. This structure predominated in programs sponsored by public schools, community colleges, and community-based organizations, and in basic literacy, GED, family literacy, and welfare classes. In short, there are striking and pervasive parallels between the structure of instruction Mehan observed in the elementary education class and adult literacy education as practiced by those in our study.

In all the adult literacy education classes we observed, the basic organizing unit of instruction was the lesson, which in every instance was selected and prepared by the teacher. As noted earlier, lessons paralleled the subjects that would normally be taught in public school classrooms: reading, writing, math, and secondary-level GED. The content of lessons came from various sources. Most teachers selected a blend of materials and activities for their lessons. For reading, common sources were commercially published series, books, and articles the teacher believed would be of interest to learners, as well as reading matter that paralleled the subjects included in the GED tests. For writing, most teachers selected writing assignments they believed were relevant to learners' lives, such as brief memoirs, or writings on the issues and challenges they believed learners faced. In GED preparation classes, some teachers selected writing assignments they believed were similar to the writing section of the GED test. The math problems that learners were asked to solve came from commercially published series, GED practice tests, problems developed by the teacher, or such authentic exercises as completing a basic tax form or computing mileage from a map legend. In contrast to classes that employed individualized instruction, no teachers in the group-based classes relied exclusively on a single commercially published series or instructional system.

Because the lesson followed by the IRE pattern is so pervasive, we use it here as a framework for examining instruction in the classes we observed.

Opening a Lesson

Opening a lesson typically began with directions to the learners. These served two functions: They conveyed what the teacher expected learners to do and signaled a shift from the previous lesson to other activities.

The opening of a lesson in one family literacy class was quite typical. In this lesson, called "facts and opinions," learners were asked to find facts—as opposed to opinions—about characters in a story they had read. The teacher started with the first character of the story, Lovedora.

> Sitting at a small desk in the front of the room, the teacher says, "Let's go on and look at our book, *The Matter of Life."* She tells the learners to look for facts about Lovedora and asks them to give her the page where they found the facts. After a question and answer session on Lovedora, the teacher reinitiates the fact-finding activity by saying, "Now we are going to do a character sketch about Endora [another character]. See if you can find any facts about Endora. After a few minutes, the teacher tells the class to look at page 167, saying, "I think you will find some facts there. Read it silently first."

Sometimes, before giving specific directions, teachers opened lessons with a brief discussion to engage the learners and establish a context for their reading. Such was the case in a class in which the learners were about to read a story about the differences between men's and women's response to stress and fear.

> The teacher asks, "Who remains calmer under pressure, men or women?" Most of the class, who are all women, chime in, "women." Only one woman disagrees, and she tells the class why she thinks men are better under pressure. The teacher asks the observer the same question he posed to the class. The observer tells the class that because women generally have more roles, many of which involve pressure, she believes women are better under pressure. However, she did not believe that men did not fare well under pressure. The teacher tells the observer that she is very logical. The teacher returns to posing the same question to students. After several learners have responded to the question, the teacher distributes a reading passage, entitled *The Dinner Party*, to everyone in the class. The passage includes a set of comprehension questions at the end. The teacher then calls on someone to read.

Spelling lessons were typically opened with a spelling test reminiscent of grade school. Teachers would read from a list of words, use a word in a sentence, and direct the learners to write the word either on paper or on the blackboard. Mistakes were then corrected. Vocabulary lessons opened with a list of words that learners were asked to define and sometimes write in their notebooks.

Writing lessons were more varied and generally had three phases, each requiring a separate opening. They typically began with the teacher's presentation of the topic. Sometimes the topic was written on the blackboard, and sometimes learners could choose among topics that, in most cases, the teacher suggested. Then, teachers typically opened the second phase, evaluation of what learners had written. This was followed by the third phase, correction and revision. Sometimes learners' writing was evaluated and corrected by teachers, sometimes by other learners through peer coaching, and sometimes by the class as a whole. Revision typically followed. In a class in which the teacher employed peer coaching to a considerable degree, the teacher's directions summed up the process.

> The teacher says, "Let me hear what you have written. Then you will break into partners . . . read it . . . comment . . . opinions and facts . . . three drafts. I would like it to make as much sense as possible. What will your partner do?" The class collectively responds, "Edit."

In other cases, the revision portion of writing lessons was initiated by the teacher's corrections, and learners worked individually on revisions, as in a GED class.

> The teacher says, "Take a look at your folders. I returned your essays on antiques." A learner asks, "What about grades?" and the teacher responds, "I don't give grades, I give comments. How many of you have corrected essays, the one with the green marks?" Most hands go up. The teacher then tells the learners, "Look over my corrections, and rewrite the essay." She tells them that she had found grammar, punctuation, and spelling mistakes. The learners begin rewriting the essays, and all seem engaged.

In math classes, teachers generally opened the lesson by giving learners a set of math problems to solve. In the following class, the teacher chose an authentic task to teach math skills.

> The teacher distributes rulers to the class and says, "Let's do a scale of miles." She tells learners that she is going to put a pair of places on the blackboard and the students are to tell her how many miles there are between them. She writes on the board, "Main Street to Second Street." She puts other destinations on the board. Students begin to work immediately to calculate the distance between points.

Elicitation

After a teacher opened a lesson and the learners had completed the tasks as directed, the next phase of the lesson was typically an elicitation, a sequence of questioning and answering led by the teacher. Communication during elicitation was almost always teacher to learner or learner to teacher. Rarely did learners pose questions to each other or join in collective discussion, unless directed to do so by the teacher as part of a peer-coaching session. During elicitation, teachers sometimes called on specific learners. In other cases, individual learners, groups of learners, or even the entire class answered.

The overwhelmingly predominant form of elicitation was of the type Mehan labeled "product elicitation," a sequence of questions and answers designed to elicit correct, factual answers from learners. Because of this, teachers' questions tended to be closed-ended, and learners' responses were generally short, consisting of a single word or sentence. A library-sponsored class provides one of the many examples of this type of elicitation.

> The teacher points to the board and asks the students to look at the word "revolution." She says, "Have you seen the word? What is it?" A student says the word out loud. Several students volunteer answers. The teacher nods in agreement and summarizes their definitions. She then points to the word "revelation," and another student gives her an answer.

A geography lesson provides another instance of product elicitation.

> The class begins work on relief maps. The teacher is sitting on a chair in front of her desk. She asks questions such as: "What is a relief map? How do you know what mountain range is higher on a relief map? What range of mountains are on the West Coast? What mountain ranges do you find in South America? What continent has few mountains?" Sometimes students answer as a group, and sometimes they answer individually. Most students provide one-word answers, such as shading, cascade, or Africa. All questions are meant to elicit factual answers. Sometimes the teacher calls upon students directly: "Daniel, can you name one Great Lake in the Great Lake area?"

In product elicitation, when learners provided the correct response, they were usually rewarded with praise. When no answer or an incorrect answer was given, most typically the teacher supplied the correct answer or kept calling on learners until obtaining the correct answer. A workplace literacy class provides an example of a teacher's pursuit of the desired answer.

> The teacher says, "Tell me what you see in the picture." There is no response to her question. She then gives the answer, saying, "Caution, hazardous waste area. Say it." The students respond, "Caution, hazardous waste area." The teacher writes the phrase on the board.

Sometimes, an incorrect answer would trigger a mini-lesson in which the teacher would give the right answer and then elaborate, thus providing more information or context to those who did not understand. One teacher demonstrated this during a reading lesson.

> The teacher asks, "Where is Siberia?" A student responds by asking the teacher if she can repeat the question in Spanish. The teacher does not respond to the request. Instead she says, "Can you find it on the map?" She then explains that the story took place in the former Soviet Union.

A third reaction to a lack of response or incorrect answers was for teachers simply to go on, to pass over the mistake or nonresponse as if it had not happened. Such was the case in a large, mixed skill–level class.

> The teacher moves to question number 15 and asks the class, "What did you decide?" One student answers number "two." Another student answers "two." The teacher: "Two, we have 2 twos." Some more students answer "two." The teacher: "We have a bunch of twos . . . Two it is." The teacher moves on to the next question. There is no response from the class. The teacher answers the question and elaborates. The observer notes, "This is a typical answer response pattern.

> Often, when a student does answer a question, the teacher does not always provide a response or explanation. Often, there are a number of different answers that go unexplained."

Based on our observations, we infer that product elicitation served at least two purposes. First, by gauging correct and incorrect responses, it enabled teachers to evaluate whether learners had understood the lesson. Second, product elicitation often carried the content of the lesson, functioning as a form of instruction. When the teacher or learners provided a correct answer, learners who had the incorrect response were "taught" the correct response, and when teachers diagnosed incorrect responses as a need for explanation or elaboration, the mini-lectures that sometimes followed enhanced learners' understanding. In our observations, we were left wondering about learners who seldom responded to the teacher's questioning. Because we could not interview learners while the class was in progress, we could not determine whether their silence reflected a will to avoid participation or lack of knowledge of the material.

Mehan referred to a second form of elicitation evident in some classes we observed as "process elicitation," a form of elicitation in which the teacher asks for learners' interpretations or opinions. In our observations, this was much less common than product elicitation. Typically, we found it in writing lessons, when the teacher was trying to help learners either create subject matter for their writing or clarify what they had written, and in reading classes, when the teacher was attempting to assess how thoroughly learners comprehended text. One such reading lesson provides an example of process elicitation.

> The teacher begins to ask questions about the story the class was reading. She is in front of the room. Everyone else is sitting. The teacher says, "What do you think?" A learner answers, "It was cool." Another says, "It was educational." A third says, "What happened to Phyllicia, that do happen." The teacher says, "What happened?" and the learner responds, "The feelings, being judged from the outside, not inside. That wasn't right." Another learner says, "It happens a lot. You're judged by the color of you skin."

In another reading lesson, this process elicitation occurred as the teacher was helping a learner elaborate on what she had written.

> The woman begins to erase something on her paper and then gives it to the teacher. The teacher asks several questions and makes several comments, "What do parents do to keep sex off limits? You are writing like you assume everyone did that." The student, who gave her paper to the teacher, responds, "My parents kept me locked up. I couldn't even look out the window." The teacher tells her that she [as a reader of the writing] needs to know more about that because the teacher's parents did not

keep her locked up, so she does not know how it feels and has to assume that many readers would also not know. The student then explains how she brought herself up during her parents' long absences due to work commitments.

In process elicitations, the questions tended to be open and longer, and more elaborate responses from learners were typical. Substantial use of process elicitation occurred in only about a quarter of the classes we observed. Because the questions teachers posed sought learners' opinions and interpretations, open, free-flowing discussion was occasionally triggered in these classes. For example, a reading lesson generated the following discussion.

> The next headline is about a man who has infected teenage girls with HIV. The teacher calls on a woman who believes the girls should have known better. The teacher says: "Yes. It occurs to me that the girls are not completely blameless. Because of the literature, it is up to each and every person to protect him or herself." Another learner is vehement: "Regardless of that, those girls are young—13–15 years old. That doesn't mean that they should get AIDS. They don't deserve AIDS." The teacher agrees that she has a point, that they don't deserve the disease. Another learner blames the parents but concludes that the guy is a creep. The teacher agrees, moves on, reading the article to the class.

In addition to product and process elicitation, Mehan notes two other forms. In choice elicitation, learners are directed to agree or disagree with a teacher's statement. Our field notes contain no incidences of this type of elicitation. The fourth of Mehan's types of elicitation is metaprocess elicitation, in which learners are asked to reflect on the process of making connections between teachers' questions and students' responses and to formulate and justify the basis of their reasoning. This form of elicitation is related to the development of critical thinking, and it was extremely rare in the classes we observed. Indeed, in only four classes class did anything even close to a metaprocess elicitation occur systematically. Here, we describe one of these rare examples.

> During a pause in the discussion the teacher asks, "What are you doing now?" Several students respond, "Discussion." The teacher says, "You should keep on doing this—critical thinking." He then lectures a bit about critical thinking. Shortly thereafter, learner to learner dialogue continues. At the conclusion of the discussion, the teacher has asked the class what they thought of the discussion. One student replies, "To me, it was a good debate, interesting debate." Another student says, "I haven't had this type of discussion for years. I've spoken abo George Washington, etc., and you get more information." Still another student says, "This is the first time I've heard about this lady [Eleanor Roosevelt], and I'm sitting here participating in this discussion like I know. It's like getting up to the top of the stairs, looking over, and taking a chance." There is some more discussion among

> students regarding their feeling about participating in the discussion. A female student says, "I don't want to stop this." A male student, referring to former first ladies, asks, "Do you think that all first ladies do things out of the goodness of their hearts or because they are first lady and need to do something in that position?" The discussion concludes with a female student saying, "I'm going to the library to research these things."

Closure

After an elicitation of any type, the lesson typically came to closure, which entailed a demarcation by the teacher indicating the lesson was over. Often, this demarcation was an evaluative statement that provided or implied praise for work well done. One teacher demonstrated this at the end of a difficult exercise on logic and clarity in writing.

> "Did you get more than half right?" Most of the class indicates they did. A learner says that she only got 6 out of 10 right. The teacher responds, "Not bad. Not bad at all."

Similarly, in a class were the learners had written a group poem, the lesson terminated as follows:

> Everyone claps. The teacher says, "We should submit it." The teacher's aide translates the poem into Spanish. All watch her and clap. The teacher says, "Okay, let's break."

Lessons lasted from between 10 minutes, which was typical of spelling, to over two hours. Writing classes were the longest in duration. Often, teachers timed lessons so that a break or the end of the class session marked the end of the lesson. Sometimes the announcement of homework, which was almost always voluntary, signaled the lesson was over.

> The teacher is still at the board. She reminds students of the homework they have. She says, "Tomorrow, read Chapter 23 in *The Friends*. Also, you should do at least two pages from what we read on immigration." While she is reading, a student is already putting on her coat. Class is over.

Most typically, a direction to students to put what they were working on away or to begin something new was the mark that a lesson had ended.

> Students continue writing. Some students approach the teacher to discuss their essays. Eventually she addresses the class, asking, "How many of you are handing

me an essay on antiques?" About a third of the class raise their hands and the teacher says, "Okay. Put it in your folder." The class is over.

Individualized Instruction

Only one of the classes we observed used individualized instruction exclusively, and four classes used a blend of individualized and group-based instruction. Individualized instruction was difficult to observe because there was little interaction between learners and only sporadic interaction between the teacher and learners. Most of the programs that used individualized instruction did so in response to the mixed skill levels of learners and continuous enrollment, which are discussed at length later in this report.

Learners in classes practicing individualized instruction were typically assigned folders or portfolios to hold their work. When students came to class, they picked up their folders, which often contained work the teacher had corrected since the last class. The learners then worked independently on sequenced materials that typically were commercially published. When learners had difficulty with an exercise, they called on a teacher or aide for assistance, and help was given, sometimes in the form of a one-on-one mini-lesson.

Because the materials were sequenced by level of difficulty, the class could accommodate learners from very different skill levels. Learners could start anywhere within the sequence and proceed at their own pace, so individualized instruction fit well with continuous enrollment.

An example of individualized instruction appeared in a class in an urban learning center that served 25 learners at the 0–8 level. In this class, learners arrived, retrieved their folders, and began to work on their own. The teacher circulated among the learners, starting with the first to arrive. For individual learners, she typically taught a 15 to 20 minute mini-lesson tailored to that person's specific problems. In the following excerpt from one of her mini-lessons, the teacher worked with Carl, who was having difficulty with math.

Teacher: So, what are we doing now? Math? Or reading out?
Carl: Yeah.
Teacher: Math?
Carl: When I was doing it at home, it got a little crazy, and I, like, said I would do it at home.
Teacher: Okay, let me take a look. This was good?
Carl: Yeah.

Teacher: I just saw this the other day. This is giving you a little problem then? Want me to do the lesson on reducing fractions?
Carl: This?
Teacher: No, this. *(She writes out a problem in his notebook.)*
Carl: I know 'em already to an extent. This bringing them down to a smaller fraction, to a smaller number.
Teacher: Let's do this one. I want to see what you're doing. You have 6 over 48. What are you doing to get down here?
Carl: To one eighth, I divide.
Teacher:: Tell me what you do, because I don't care about . . . tell me what you're going to do. You haven't seen this before, so tell me what you're going to do.
Carl: See, six by—do you see?
Teacher: Okay, do you remember the rule about even numbers?
Carl: Yeah. This one is an even number, and that's one here, too. So both of them can go into an eight.

Because the teacher was working one-on-one, she could tailor her mini-lesson directly to the specific problem Carl was experiencing. Although this kind of attention is helpful to individual students, the time involved meant that only a small proportion of the 18 learners present got the help they needed on the day of our observation. In a California class for learners at skill levels 1–4, learners sat at tables organized by tested grade level. A series of computers was arranged along one wall of the room. Most learners worked individually, either on sequenced written materials or on computer programs that taught various skills in individualized mode. The teacher moved from group to group, giving learners work assignments, helping individuals, and sometimes presenting mini-lessons appropriate to the group's level. The following excerpts describe what an observer saw during the class.

I ask the teacher if they are using a series. She calls over a student and shows me her folder. She explains that the students are grouped by levels and that they are checked off by the completion of skills such as word attack, context, etc. The grid she presents has a row of skills listed across the top and a column that identifies the series levels along the side. Each square contains the date of completion and the teacher's initials. Francine has completed over two pages in the grid.

The class now has seven students. While they appear to be scattered randomly about the room, they are actually seated according to their level.

Under the clock at the side of the room sit three students, all of the same level. A woman and a man sit across from each other, each with reading books. They pause from their reading and exchange quiet conversation in Spanish. Across the room sit three students spread out in a line. They sit with notebooks open and are writing. A woman sits alone at the front table quietly reading. The students are all working very independently, not asking for help. There is not much interaction.

Teachers who used individualized instruction faced two major challenges. The first was providing help to learners when they needed it. When help was not immediately available, learners were stalled, their learning was temporarily suspended, and they became frustrated. Building norms that encouraged learners to seek help was therefore critical because they often did not receive help unless they asked for it. The second challenge was correcting learners' work because learners had no other way to know whether they had successfully learned what their individualized materials had directed. These challenges reflect the importance of small class sizes and adequate staffing.

Classes in which teachers used the individualized instruction mode differed from group-based instruction in their focus on the individual student, yet the structure of instruction was really quite similar in the application of the lesson-IRE model. Materials typically directed learners to perform a task or engage in an activity, thereby opening the lesson. A form of written IRE followed. The initiation phase of the elicitation sequence was in the form of written rather than oral questions, and learners replied in writing. The evaluation component of IRE was typically performed by the teacher, aide, or other learners who checked student answers for correctness and provided help when needed. In classes in which individualized instruction was used exclusively, there was no opportunity for activities that might alter or expand IRE, such as group discussion and project-based learning. For this reason, individualized instruction may be even more skill development–based than group-oriented instruction.

Discussion

Our analysis of the structure of adult literacy education instruction demonstrates two very important points. First, the structure of adult literacy education is extremely similar to elementary and secondary education. This finding is not surprising, given that most teachers in our study had been trained in elementary and secondary education, most had experience as elementary or secondary teachers, and most of the commercially published materials were based on elementary and secondary education models. Moreover, learners seemed to expect an elementary/secondary school model. For example, in one of the few classes that deviated somewhat from the lesson-IRE structure, a student resisted the teacher's attempts at such deviation.

> The teacher asks if anyone else wants to read what they have written. One student, Janice, volunteers and shares her story, which includes the line/a section, "My love for my kids is so special, that I can't even put it into words." When she is finished the teacher says, "There are some beautiful thoughts there." She then asks the class if someone wants to provide feedback, a question that typically had elicited

> discussion among the learners. Janice reprimands the teacher, saying, "Alice, you have to stop with that feedback."

Here, although the teacher attempts to open a round of discussion, the student seeks to avoid it, suggesting that the student does not view such activity as a real lesson.

A second very important point is that the predominance of product elicitation suggests that adult literacy education is highly oriented toward basic skill development in its structure. Teachers are much more concerned with instilling factual knowledge than with developing higher-order abilities, such as critical thinking. The evidence suggests that one reason is that teachers are quite concerned with their learners' progress toward the GED and realize there is limited classroom time in which to accomplish this goal. This sense of immediacy is reinforced by learners, who also wish to progress toward the GED as quickly as possible. This places a premium on efficiency, which is equated with discrete lessons and the teaching of facts. The activities that can contribute toward such skills as critical thinking and problem solving—activities such as open discussion and metacognative elicitation—are considered deviations from the path to the GED and an unacceptable waste of valuable time.

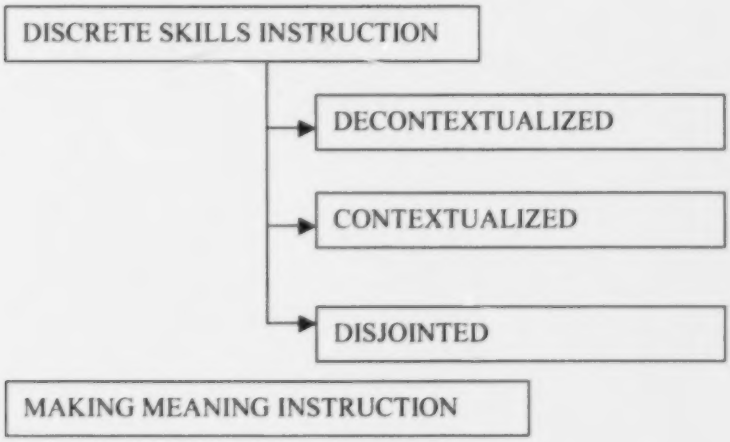
A Typology of Classes

As we completed our analysis of the content and structure of instruction, we explored the possibility of categorizing the classes we observed into a typology. At the outset, we established four criteria for the efficacy of this analysis:

- The two researchers who had conducted the analysis of content and structure data had to agree without reservation on the categories and their attributes.
- The categories had to be discrete, without any overlap among them.
- All the classes we observed had to fall neatly within categories, and the analysts had to agree on the assignment of classes to categories.
- The categories had to be sensitizing, furthering an understanding of structure and context rather than obscuring it.

With these criteria in mind, we developed a suitable categorization for the classes we had observed. The classes can be divided into two broad categories: discrete skills instruction and making meaning instruction. Additionally, discrete skills instruction can be divided into three subcategories: decontextualized, contextualized, and disjointed. Figure One graphically presents the relationships between the typology components.

Figure One: Components of the Typology of Classes



Discrete Skills Instruction

The overwhelming majority of the classes we observed (16, or 80 percent), fell into the category of discrete skills instruction. Attributes of a discrete skills orientation are:

- Teacher-prepared and teacher-delivered lessons focusing on conveyance of factual information and literal recall from learners.
- A predominance of commercially published materials for reading, writing, math, and GED instruction.
- Lessons, each with a clear beginning and end, organized into distinct time periods.
- A focus on the discrete skills that encompass traditional subject areas. Reading, for example, is divided into comprehension, inference, facts and opinions, etc. Math is divided into addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, and the rules governing mathematical operations are emphasized.
- A high degree of teacher to learner and learner to teacher interaction and low degree of learner to learner interaction.

Although discrete skills instruction was clearly evident in all 16 of the classes we grouped under this category, differences among the classes that can be described using three subcategories: decontextualized instruction, contextualized instruction, and disjointed instruction.

Decontextualized Discrete Skills

The discrete skills classes we identified as being decontextualized represent the purest form of discrete skills instruction; nine of the classes we observed fell into this category. Lessons focused clearly on discrete skill building, and the elicitations that followed were almost exclusively product elicitations. Teachers seemed primarily concerned with moving learners from one level to another, from pre-GED to GED, for example, or from one grade level to another on a standardized test. The structure of these classes revolved around teacher-prepared and teacher-delivered lessons organized into distinct time units that moved from one activity or subject area to another.

For the most part, the content of instruction was framed by the subject taught and the commercially published ABE materials employed, rather than by the systematically diagnosed needs of learners or by learners' adult experiences. In decontextualized instruction, free and open discussion characterized by learner-to-learner interaction and use of authentic activities were very rare.

We observed an example of this form of instruction in a pre-GED enrolling nearly 40 students. The teacher wrote the outline for the class on the board every evening, much as we describe below.

> We walk into the classroom at 6:38, and eight students are already seated at their desks. The teacher immediately begins to write on the blackboard.
>
> She writes: *ABE II: Monday (date).*
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | Reading: | Science, p. 415–417 |
> | | Ex.- (#'s 1–8) |
> | Writing: | Hand in essay on collecting antiques |
> | Math: | Final Decimal Review |
> | | + - x ▪ |
> | | Word problems; using decimals |
>
> At 7:00 sharp, the teacher begins. She stands in front of the room and says, "We're going to discuss the human body." She then walks to the blackboard and writes "Human Body" in large letters. She draws a circle around the words. She asks questions and extends lines from the encircled word "Human Body" with words that indicate the internal organs of the body such as muscles, tendons, and nerves. She writes these words on the board once she has received the answer from a learner. The following are some of the questions and answers that were exchanged.

> *Teacher:* "What keeps us standing up?" *(Students raise their hands. Someone is called on.)*
> *Answer:* "Bones."
> *Teacher:* "What's another words for veins?"
> *Answer:* "Nerves."
> *Teacher:* "That's not another word for veins . . ."

A pre-GED class provides a very similar example.

> The teacher asks, "Is 'valiant' a noun, verb, or adjective?" People raise their hands and the teacher says, "Let Marcie get it." There are a lot of choral answers and the class is pretty noisy. . . . They are up to the seventh word now. The teacher says, "Angela Rae. Go ahead, what does it mean, and give it to me in a sentence." Marcie, who is looking in the dictionary, says, "I am capable of doing math." The teacher responds, "Very good, Ms. Rae." The teacher calls on Carla, who is sitting near the door. She responds correctly about the definition and part of speech. The teacher says, "She was good."

These excerpts were typical of the structure of decontextualized classes. The teacher planned the lesson and directed learners to engage in an activity that was followed by a product elicitation. In both cases, the emphasis was on conveying factual information, and commercially produced materials predominated.

Contextualized Discrete Skills

Four classes from our sample were categorized as contextualized. Although product elicitations still dominated and the emphasis was still on discrete skills, process elicitations that sought learners' attitudes and opinions were also part of classroom discourse. Occasionally, instructional content was contextualized around themes related to the learners' lives, although the teacher usually generated the themes.

Although some materials were commercially published, authentic reading and writing materials and activities were also apparent in contextualized classes. These materials included items such as newspapers, train schedules, and medical brochures, as well as literature and poetry. Often, materials we labeled as authentic were selected by the teachers because a learner had expressed interest in a subject or because the teachers felt the reading materials were culturally relevant to the learners in their classes. For example, one class used a book on photography as a text after a learner expressed interest in the subject. In another class, the teacher chose a book by Zora Neale Hurston because the learners in her class were Black females. Writing activities were considered authentic when learners were encouraged to write about their interests and experiences. In short, although the contextualized classes we

observed were clearly oriented toward developing discrete skills, and although instruction was usually decontextualized, there were also episodes in which instruction became contextualized around learners' lives and experiences.

When we first observed the following workplace literacy class situated in a hospital, the learners were upset because management had issued layoff notices. The teacher incorporated this in her lesson.

> The teacher asks the learners, "How was the meeting run? Were there managers there? Does every department have them?" A student responds, "Yeah, in my hospital." Someone asks the teacher what consolidation means. The teacher writes consolidate on the board. A learner says, "They've already consolidated Margie's and Janet's department." Learners keep discussing the consequences of consolidation. "If you have 20 years, you are allowed to bump another person." There are agreements and disagreements as to whether this is a true statement. There is a lot of dialogue taking place among the students.
>
> The discussion lasted about 40 minutes. When all the issues seemed to have been saturated with discussion, the teacher said, "Why don't you write for 15 minutes?" She wrote on the board, "Do you think this system is fair?" Everyone in the class wrote, and several of them shared their writing. This led to another round of discussion. Eventually, some of the learners wrote their essays on the board, and structural and spelling revisions were made.

Because the first class we observed at the site included one of the few contextualized, free-flowing discussions noted in our 40 observations and because it revolved around an authentic exercise, we were very surprised during our second observation of the same teacher's class that the lesson was taken from a commercially published workbook, was unconnected to learners' experience, and revolved around such grammatical structures as verb–subject agreement. When we interviewed the teacher, she shared her understanding of the difference between the two classes.

> I make sure that the students understand that this is their class. We deal with the subjects that are important to them. I depend on them to tell me what is important. Most of the time it is things like spelling, punctuation, and grammar. But at least twice a month it's things like union busting, lack of raises, and things like that. I never plan for it, but when it happens, I forget what I had planned and make a lesson out of their issues.

Another contextualized class was composed of learners who had tested below a fourth-grade level. Some were native born, and others were immigrants. The teacher told us that she was piloting Equipped for the Future (EFF), an initiative of the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL). EFF has developed content standards for

adult education, explaining what adults should know and be able to do to meet the demands of their roles as workers, family members, and citizens. Created with extensive input from the field, the project seeks to improve the quality of adult education services by more clearly defining expected results.

EFF stresses contextualized instruction, which helps explain why we observed a contextualized episode in this particular class. During our first observation with this teacher, the lesson dealt with stress. Below is a teacher-led elicitation, followed by some of the learners' responses.

> *Teacher:* What are some stresses of the community? . . . What are some family stresses? . . . What about the worker role?
> *Learner:* Neighbors, dogs, money matters, kids, spouse, no jobs, low pay, cranky boss.
> *Teacher:* Does a cranky boss affect family life?
> *Learner:* Oh yes, when I see the cranky boss, I do not even want to talk to my husband.
> *Teacher:* Do you see how the roles overlap?

Although the teacher employed process-oriented elicitation to seek the learners' opinions and to contextualize the material, the episode did not lead to substantial discussion. The lesson continued, with learners completing a survey about stress, listening to an audiotape designed to lessen stress, and reading round-robin from a stress-related handout that was downloaded from the Internet. Although we saw some contextualized elements in this example, during the second class we observed with this teacher, we witnessed a very traditional, decontextualized, discrete skills lesson. This again demonstrates the point that in the classes we categorized as having discrete skills instruction, any contextualized elements were episodic deviations from the standard decontextualized format.

Disjointed Discrete Skills

Three of the 16 classes fell into the category of disjointed discrete skill instruction. With this type of instruction, the content was so unfocused that teaching goals and objectives could not be inferred from observation, and much of what transpired seemed to happen by chance. When learners engaged in academic tasks, they tended not to complete them. Teachers seemed more focused on keeping learners busy and making them comfortable than on providing coherently organized instruction. Although little real teaching took place in these classes, it was consistent with what we have called discrete skills instruction when it happened. Although teachers seemed concerned about their learners, this concern was expressed primarily through

affective interactions rather than through structured learning activities. In disjointed instruction, it was as if affect had replaced substance.

The following is typical of what took place in a class for homeless adults that we labeled as disjointed.

> The teacher gets up and puts her arm on Jim, a student. "I'm going to help you concentrate. Tell me what you're doing today." He starts to respond, but before he can complete his response, she gets up. She looks at another student and says, "Do you have the book you need?"

Several minutes later, when the teacher still had not returned, Jim looked around the room, pulled in his chair, and put his head down on his desk. During our second observation, something very similar happened.

> The teacher asks Jim to read a definition. He reads the definition and gives his own version. As he is explaining himself, the teacher pulls herself away and moves over to another student. She kneels down by her side and asks if she will be in class the whole time. The student nods. The teacher turns back to Jim and says, "I'm sorry I walked away from you in midsentence."

The teacher's apparent inability to stay focused was also characteristic of a family literacy class.

> The teacher tells the student that she is going to give him a practice test. She explains the practice test to him. . . . She leaves the room to take a phone call. . . . The teacher returns and walks over to another student sitting against the window and says, "How ya doin'? What do you want to work on?" She then addresses another student.

For the most part, the disjointed classes were relatively individualized, but when direct teaching did take place, as in all discrete skills classes, it was typified by teacher-controlled product elicitations. It is important to note that all the classes we have classified as disjointed were unusual in their context or history. One was a family literacy class that until recently had been funded by welfare. With changes in the welfare law, learners who had been present six hours per day were now at work, and new learners had been recruited from the community to maintain class size. It is likely that the class had not yet adjusted to its new context when we observed it. Another disjointed class was a family literacy class in which the adult literacy teacher had been laid off because the program lacked sufficient funding, and the class was now taught by a social worker. The third disjointed class was a class for the homeless in which the lack of apparent focus may be at least partially caused by

the personal attributes of the learners and lack of support from the sponsoring agency.

Making Meaning Instruction

Making meaning instruction is the second of our major categories of instruction in adult education. Only 4 of the 20 classes we observed fell into this category, which has attributes that included:

- A focus on such things as problem-solving skills, critical thinking, creativity, and social awareness in addition to reading, writing, and mathematical skill development.
- Emphasis on process over structure and lessons that are less likely to be structured into discrete units bounded by time.
- Considerably more collaboration between teachers and learners than in discrete skills classes.
- Use, for the most part, of authentic materials rather than commercially published ones.
- Teachers who tend to function more as facilitators and process managers than as conveyors of information.
- Authority relationships between teachers and learners that are more level than those in discrete skills classes. All teachers in this category negotiated curricular content with learners to some extent.
- A high level of learner engagement.
- Communication that is learner to learner as well as teacher to learner and learner to teacher.
- Spontaneous expression of learners' feelings and opinions.

A class in the Southeast in which EFF had been adopted provides an example of making meaning instruction. The teacher initiated the class with a "thought of the day," which on the day we observed was, "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams" (Eleanor Roosevelt). According to the teacher, the purpose of the "thought" was to "Let students develop their own insights related to the theme." What began as an essay-writing exercise turned into a discussion among the learners.

> Two learners spontaneously begin to debate about who did more, Princess Diana or Eleanor Roosevelt. Eventually, most of the learners begin discussing this subject.

> . . . A woman responds, "Good point, but Eleanor Roosevelt did stuff before TV. She didn't need publicity. Di wanted publicity." A man responds, "She was a queen; she didn't have to do that."
>
> The discussion continued for about 20 minutes and moved to subjects such as Lyndon Johnson and his social programs, Ted Turner not paying his fair share of taxes, Mother Teresa, donating to charities, and God. A female learner says, "You should not put your trust in any man. You should put your trust in the Lord." Another learner responds, "I'm a skeptic. I don't even trust Mother Teresa."
>
> It was not until 10 minutes had passed before the teacher intervened, and then it was only to respond to a question about the 1929 stock market crash. Rather than dominating the discussion, the teacher played the role of facilitator. For example, when several people spoke at the same time, the teacher interjected comments such as, "Listen to each other." At other points, he called for summation with statements such as "Let's see what you've touched on," and "What things do you want to see in a charity before you give to it?"

At times, the teacher emphasized the importance of critical thinking skills to the learners. In this class, critical reflection was encouraged, as in the following example.

> *Teacher:* "This has been very valuable today. It wasn't what I planned . . . You covered a lot." He then summarizes some of what they had discussed. He points to the EFF poster emphasizing the different roles. He indicates that what they discussed had to do with access to information, choice, and independent action. "Let's look at some of the content framework for EFF standards. What are some things on that you did today?" . . . "How does your past affect today?" The teacher points out that they resolved conflicts and continued with their discussion. A learner interjects, "We disagreed agreeably."

Also central to this class was a concerted effort to understand and address learner needs. For example, during a discussion on goal setting, the teacher shared books with learners that he had selected for them on the basis of their stated goals. He displayed books on photography, math, budgeting, punctuation, and grammar, all topics in which the students had previously indicated an interest.

Attention to meeting learners' goals, critical thinking, and negotiation of instructional content were also evident in a mixed-level class sponsored by a community-based organization. All the learners were women and on welfare. In this class, there was a considerable amount of thematic discussion around issues learners considered interesting or important, and much of the communication was learner to learner. Discussion was lively and at times even heated.

> One learner says, "Everybody is entitled to their own opinions. Another learner says, "Maybe you shouldn't talk so loud." She says, even louder, "See, that's why I don't like bitches." A third learner glares at her and says, "Do you see where you took the discussion?" "Yes, 'cause I want to take it there."

Although in this class the content of instruction might be considered controversial by many, learners had a substantial voice in selecting it. For example, a learner brought to class *The Blackman's Guide to Understanding the Blackwoman* by Shahrazad Ali, and the teacher incorporated it into the day's reading lesson. The following is a passage from the introduction to the book.

> The Blackman and Blackwoman in America have a problem. They do not get along. Before the Blackman can devise a solution he must know the components of the problem. The first factor is that the Blackwoman is out of control. She does not submit to guidance by her God-given mate, the Blackman. Her intention to overpower and subdue the Blackman is motivated by several factors, the most prevalent being self-initiated nearly psychotic insecurity. Her disrespect for the Blackman is a direct cause for the destruction of the Black family.

> When the teacher introduces a copy of Chapter 1, she says, "You guys may disagree with some of this." After the passage is distributed, they proceed to do round-robin reading.

> After a few paragraphs have been read, the teacher stops and asks, "Anybody else?" When no one responds, the teacher asks the learners what they think of the passage. One woman says, "It's true for some people." The teacher says, "How would a Black man know all this?" She explains that a man is saying what a woman says, does, and feels. A learner interjects, "It's not coming from nothing." The class then discussed whether they should continue reading the book. Together, the women inspected the table of contents and decided which chapters should be copied and read in class.

In this class, learners freely expressed their opinions, sometimes at the prompting of the teacher and sometimes spontaneously. Discussion of a possible grant to alter the program revealed the learners' sense of ownership.

> The teacher tells the students that the director of the program has applied for a grant that could substantially change the program by tying instructional content to placing people in jobs. She says that the philosophy of the program may become, "Get work, keep work, and thrive." A student says, "That's good." The teacher tells the class that she believes that they should give the director input about how the program should be run. A student says, "I want a job."

> Finally, a learner says, "I used to work as a nurse's aide. Now I can't do that job because I can't pass the test. That's not fair." The learner says she can benefit from both school and work. They then spend the next half hour discussing how they can integrate job skill building into the educational component.

As further indication of learner voice, the teacher described an occasion when a former student was offended by the sexual content of a book read in class and complained to her social worker at the welfare agency. The social worker brought this complaint to the literacy program's director. The teacher describes what happened when she informed the class about the complaint.

> . . . Everybody who was in the class wanted to fight for our right to read whatever we chose, even if it had sexual content. So we wrote a letter to the welfare agency.

Discussion

The results of classification analysis clearly support our earlier conclusion that, for the most part, adult literacy instruction is oriented toward conveying factual information and developing discrete basic skills. This finding is consistent with the empirical findings of *Last Gamble on Education* (Mezirow, Darkenwald, & Knox, 1975) and the work of Collins (1992) but at odds with most of the prescriptive literature we reviewed. We have inferred that this way of teaching is a product of teachers' and learners' prior socialization and the belief among teachers that this type of instruction is what learners' need and expect. At the same time, however, the typology we have presented clarifies some of the differences among the classes we observed. Although they are in the distinct minority, there are discrete skills classes in which instruction is to some degree contextualized around the lives and experiences of learners. There are also classes in which instruction is disjointed and lacks focus, and there are making meaning classes in which process is emphasized over structure and an effort is made to develop problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and social awareness.

This raises the question of what kind of instruction is best. On one hand, what we have termed discrete skills instruction may be the most efficient way of moving learners to higher levels as defined by commonly used standardized tests and the quickest way to help learners pass the GED tests. On the other hand, it could be that this form of instruction is inadequate if the objective is to prepare learners for meaningful employment in today's workforce or success in higher education.

CHAPTER FIVE: CLASSROOM PROCESS

Although in their structure and content adult literacy education and elementary/ secondary education have significant similarities, classroom process obviously differs between the two. In many cases, this can be attributed to the nature of the adult literacy clientele. Classroom process, as we have defined it, represents interactions between teachers and learners and among learners. Although related to teaching and learning, these interactions do not directly bear upon what is commonly defined as curriculum. In this chapter, we will examine several processes that proved important in our analysis: sanctioning, engagement, directing, correcting, helping, expressing values and opinions, and developing community.

Sanctioning

Sanctioning is the process of rewarding and punishing behavior. It is a particularly interesting process because looking at what is sanctioned positively and negatively makes it possible to identify many of the social rules, or norms, that govern classroom behavior.

Tardiness is a behavior that is seldom tolerated in elementary and secondary school, and in the public school context, the sanctions for chronic tardiness can be severe. In the classes we observed, however, tardiness was endemic. Although we did not ask learners why they were late, teachers attributed lateness to learners' need to deal with issues such as transportation, childcare, and work before they arrived in class. Teachers and learners alike considered tardiness part of adult literacy education.

Teachers appeared to accept tardiness, as they rarely negatively sanctioned learners who arrived late for class. In the following example, a teacher pleasantly greets a tardy learner with no indication that she is late.

> As the teacher is writing on the board, Marge enters 40 minutes late and takes a seat next to another learner. The teacher says, "Good morning," and Marge responds with "Good morning." The teacher continues on, asking questions about the story the class was reading.

Sometimes teachers briefly acknowledged latecomers and then moved on with the lesson. For example, in an urban class, a woman walked in a half hour late. The teacher asked, "Where were you yesterday?" but did not wait for an answer, continuing the lesson instead.

In other cases, latecomers were simply ignored, as in the following atypically large class. After class had been in session 20 minutes, the observer noted the following:

> The class is presently very crowded. Three students have walked in, discovered that there are no available seats, left the room, and dragged in three seats. There are now 35 students in the room, and by the end of the class there were 38 students. As latecomers walk in, the teacher continues with her lesson. She does not pause.

Even in those rare cases in which latecomers caused disruption, order was restored almost instantaneously, and the lesson resumed. Such was the case in the classroom described below.

> A student arrives 40 minutes late. She is a young woman. There are a few wolf whistles from across the room, some laughter and talking in the class. The teacher looks up and says, "Excuse me, I am reading with these people, and I can't hear them." The room gets quiet, and the teacher continues her work with a group of students.

Tardy learners were expected to, and did, engage with the lesson on their own, with little help or guidance from the teacher other than a brief reference to the lesson in progress. Although tardiness was a problem in the classes we observed to the extent that late-arriving learners obviously missed instruction, tardiness was routine and expected, so it rarely interfered substantially with conducting the class. When tardy learners arrived, learners who were present barely acknowledged the new arrival, and the tone and atmosphere of the class were undisturbed.

Another behavior that revealed interesting sanctioning patterns was tuning out, time spent in off-task behavior that goes beyond temporary disengagement. Like tardiness, tuning out is tolerated in adult literacy education, even though it is seldom tolerated in most other educational settings. Seeing a learner sleep or lay a head on a desk for several minutes was not uncommon, even while other students were fully engaged in class activities, as described in two incidents below.

> The entire class is answering the teacher's questions; however, Rosa is dominating the discussion. Marsha and Althea join in as they can. Althea seems extremely confused. Daniel is visibly sleeping, with his head down in the back of the room.

> A young man with bleached blond hair comes in wearing glasses and carrying a huge tote bag. He talks seemingly to himself, puts his head down, and stays that way. Jennie, another student, continues working.

Some learners tuned out in more active ways, taking breaks whenever they wanted to do so.

> The teacher quickly walks to her file cabinet and pulls out Althea's folder. While she is at the file, another student walks in, looks at the coffee supplies, and shouts in the teacher's direction, "I'm going over to the Taco Bell to get some cream."

Sometimes learners wandered for no apparent purpose.

> The learner sometimes stands up, parts the blinds, and looks down on the street. He sharpens a pencil, sits down, and continues to look out of the window.

It is difficult to know why learners were tuning out because we were unable to ask them at the time the behavior occurred. There are, however, at least two plausible explanations. One is boredom, especially in mixed skill-level classes in which lessons were sometimes either too difficult or too easy for the learners. In one mixed-level class in which we observed several instances of tuning out, learners conveyed their dissatisfaction and boredom.

> The woman who did not attend in the morning says, "My wish? Let's get good dictionaries." She picks up one of the dictionaries and points, saying, "In this dictionary, the words are too small. It's old fashioned." . . . One of the female students says to the teacher, "It's boring here." The teacher looks chagrined.

Another possible explanation for tuning out is that learners were sometimes simply worn out from their jobs or family responsibilities. The teacher of a class in which we observed two sleeping learners expressed this belief.

> *Teacher:* Yes, if someone puts their head down and sleeps, I will allow it in this class because they may have worked the last 12 hours. And they need a 20-minute nap, okay? *(laughing)*
> *Observer:* Yes, I noticed yesterday, there were a few people who looked exhausted and who looked better after . . .
> *Teacher:* Yeah, they need their nap. Not everybody here works, but some people do work.

Tuning-out behavior is particularly intriguing for two reasons. First, it may be that tuning out indicates impending dropping out and may, therefore, serve as an early warning. If this were established by further research, and if we better understood the reasons for tuning out, successful dropout interventions might be designed. Second, in the great majority of tuning-out episodes, learners reengaged and continued to work on-task. Passive tuning-out behavior—sleeping, for example—did

not disrupt the class. Thus, like tardiness, tuning out had little impact on instruction, other than for the learners involved.

Positive Sanctioning

In virtually every class we observed, teachers liberally employed positive sanctioning in the form of verbal praise. Although teachers varied in how frequently and effusively they praised, with the differences at least partially attributable to personality, verbal praise was the most common way of rewarding correct work and answers during question and answer sessions. Verbal praise was commonly expressed with words such as "good," "great," or "excellent." An example from a math class demonstrates the point.

> The teacher takes the class through the Table of Contents, asking specific students to continue reading down the list about what they've learned about fractions. The teacher says, "How many of you feel you've really mastered this unit?" Patricia raises her hand, and the teacher says, "Good, what about you, Sheila? I think you did well. I think you did much better than you did last year on it. Don't you?"

Some teachers used humor to convey praise. A math class completing a tax form as an exercise serves as an example.

> As they complete the tax form, the teacher asks, "What do you think Joseph is?" Margarita responds, "A student." The teacher then asks, "Veronica, what could your husband put down [on the tax form]?" Veronica responds, "Housewife?" The teacher says, "You could put down student. . . . How many hours are you in class? I am going to tell your husband *(laughing)*. You have done your first tax form!" And they all clap and cheer.

Material symbols were also sometimes used as positive sanctions.

> The teacher stresses that the spelling test is optional—students only take it if they want to. She said, "We give incentive awards for the student that has the highest score at the end of the month. But it's optional. Some people may not have time to study or have a problem at home."

A critical issue regarding teachers' positive sanctioning activity pertains to the behavior rewarded and the norm the sanction is designed to reinforce. It was clear that in the great majority of cases, the desired behavior was providing the correct answer, and the norm was being correct in a very factual and literal sense. Only very rarely were learners praised for independent or creative thinking, and learners were seldom encouraged to express their own opinions.

Negative Sanctioning

When instances of teachers' negative sanctioning were compared to instances of positive sanctioning, it was very clear that positive sanctioning overwhelmingly predominated. Moreover, in those cases where negative sanctioning did occur, it usually took the form of mild verbal rebuke.

For example, in a large mixed-level class, the teacher had had a difficult night and was frustrated because learners were not responding to her questioning. The previous week, she had passed out materials so learners could work on them at home. When she discovered that several learners had not brought the materials to class, she used verbal sarcasm as a negative sanction.

> The teacher asks, "Am I to assume that the rest of you bumps on a log didn't even do this or what?" To a female learner she remarks in a sing song fashion, "Are you alive and well over there?" The learner nods yes. To a male student, the teacher asks, "Okay, did you do it?" He says something the observer can't hear. Another student is looking through his notebook. The teacher says to him, "Finding it would be a good idea." The teacher's tone was sarcastic but not harsh.

As in the above example, negative sanctioning often seemed to be influenced by teachers' frustration or fatigue. When teachers employed negative sanctioning, they often attempted to soften it with a positive follow-up response. The following episode occurred at the end of a class.

> The student with the headache seems to be getting extremely playful. She joins the conversation between the teacher and few remaining students and makes a grammatical error in her speech. She says, "I don't be looking at nobody." The teacher sternly corrects her, the only correction of this sort throughout the day. The teacher, possibly realizing her stern retort, soothes the student by reminding her of her newness to the program.

Our field notes were liberally punctuated with examples of teachers' positive sanctioning. In contrast, negative sanctioning was rare and typically mild. In fact, as noted earlier, teachers chose to let tardiness and tuning out pass rather than sanction this behavior negatively. According to what teachers told us in interviews, most teachers were concerned about creating a friendly and supportive classroom learning climate. They also believed that their role was to help learners grow and develop, and a corollary to these values was to reward rather than punish. In an interview, one teacher expressed such a view of her role.

> *Interviewer:* If you had a philosophy of adult education, what would it be?
> *Teacher:* Adults helping each other. And that's one thing I love so much about it. I see my role as the facilitator, where I bring a bunch of wonderful people together to share their skills—share of themselves—and watch them each grow in their own way.

If Mezirow et al. (1975) are correct, another set of reasons for the relative lack of negative sanctioning may lie beneath the surface, however. Based on classroom observations, teacher interviews, and a survey, Mezirow et al. concluded that teachers were reluctant to negatively sanction learners because learners would drop out. The comments of a teacher we interviewed lend support to this interpretation.

The interviewer asks the teacher about two learners who had come in late during the class she observed. The teacher says about the tardiness, "Yeah, I ignore it." The teacher then goes on to explain.

> No way. They have so many problems at home. See, we have a sign-in sheet, so at the end of the month I tally up their hours, and then I turn it in to my supervisor. So if they haven't met the criteria for the month, she writes them a letter. But, like, I don't even deal with that. I came here to teach. I can't be punitive and all that. I just turn the hours in, and she writes a letter, a warning letter or something. Plus, if I stop and asked them, "Why are you late?" then I'll lose my class. And then I also noticed that teachers who harp on it—they lose students. I want to retain as many as I can.

Engagement

For learners, engagement is the act of being involved in the lesson. It is characterized by focused attention and time on task. Engagement is clearly an important social process because learners need to be engaged to learn what the teacher intended. In reality, engagement was a continuum. In some classes, all learners were thoroughly engaged at some points, as in one GED class.

> Most students work alone. Several are collaborating and have moved their desks to be closer to each other. A few students are sharing a huge pre-GED book, but most students have their own. Everyone is reading silently. The teacher asks if anybody needs help. A few people indicate they need help by raising their hands. . . . Most students continue to work alone and silently. The whole class is engaged in the reading.

At other times, some learners were engaged while others were less attentive.

> Marta gets up to get scratch paper, which is on a bookshelf near me, says a few words to Maria in Spanish, and then continues her work. As they continue to work on the worksheets, Elma is trying to copy answers. She also whispers and laughs with Hilda; these two students appear to be getting nothing done.

An interesting lesson seemed to promote learner engagement, as shown in this excerpt from a reading lesson.

> The teacher interrupts occasionally to ask more questions. After a few minutes, the teacher points out dialect in the story, saying "Now see, it's the dialect that's hard, isn't it? Now, see, this is also dialect here. . . ." She reads "puttin' things" from the book. The students seem to be very interested in the story—they are really following it intently. When the story is suddenly told in the first person, the teacher stops Sally to ask the class, "Who is telling this story? Anyone remember?" Discussion follows, and they conclude that it might be a neighbor. Sally continues reading. There's some occasional background giggling from Mary as the story becomes humorous.

Although ambiguous lessons were rare, they made learners' meaningful engagement problematic. In one class in which all the learners were foreign-born and hailed from various countries, learners revealed a lack of understanding.

> There seems to be mass confusion as to what Sarah should be questioning. Sarah appears to be responding not to the writing style but to the actual content that speaks to the Bible. So when she is asked what she likes, she seems to be interpreting the question as what she likes about the Bible. She doesn't seem to get the teacher's purpose. She says she likes the parts that say "no kill, no steal," as she refers to the parts of the Bible, not the writing. The teacher then instructs Andrew to ask Sarah some questions about the writing they had read together. Andrew reviews the handout on revising writing. He says to Sarah, "Is your writing clear?" Sarah responds, "Yes, it is." At this point, it seems evident that neither student understands the question.

In many of the classes we observed, learners' skill levels varied greatly. When the lesson was either too difficult or too easy for a learner, engagement often ceased. In a class in which one learner was a nonreader, this resulted.

> Everyone in the class except Tarik [the nonreader] is paying attention. *(Later)* All this time, the class has been engaged, except Tarik, who is looking around. *(Later)* Tarik is called upon. He was almost asleep and vaults to attention. Some in the class laugh. *(Still later)* Tarik leaves the room. A lesson on fractions proceeds.

> *(During the next class, one week later)* All the students seem to be paying attention except Tarik, who seems to be daydreaming.

In individualized classes, engagement sometimes ceased when learners needed help and the teacher was unavailable. In one individualized class, the teacher was occupied with another learner when a learner needed help.

> At the teacher's free moment, Wendy calls for help. The teacher turns and sits down next to Wendy to work through a problem. Victor stares ahead, watching them work. Stan is not working at this moment. He is looking around the room, then at his paper. He pulls in his chair and puts his head down on the desk. The observer then noted, "This is a sign that Stan is really in need of help. The teacher's previous offer seems to be lost to other intrusions. He [Stan] is either frustrated, defeated, confused, or bored. All could be a possibility."

A final barrier to engagement was classroom disruption. In family literacy classes, the presence of children in the classroom was sometimes a detriment to engagement, as in the instance described below.

> The teacher's aide picks up crayons and paper and goes to the window. She motions the child to come with her (she's trying to take care of the child so her mother can concentrate better). The teacher also encourages the child to go with the aide. Carmen, in Spanish, joins in, tells her daughter to go with the aide. The child ignores them all and stays in her mother's lap. *(Later)* The teacher says, "Carmen or Andrea? Who wants to read?" Carmen says, "Go ahead, Andrea." Andrea reads. Everyone listens. The teacher has her eyes closed. Susan has her arms folded. The child is trying to get Carmen's attention. Carmen is trying to stay involved, but the child is now getting her attention.

In another class, the presence of several young, immature learners disrupted the class and interrupted those who had been engaged.

> Leandra begins making noises, with her hand raised to be acknowledged. The teacher ignores her as she works with Zena at her desk. Leandra [who is under age 20] and Raymond [who is also under age 20] continue to carry on conversations about life in general. Suddenly, Leandra shouts to Raymond, "I'll stick my hands down your pants." To which Raymond responds, with a smile, "I'll stick my hands down your pants." The teacher responds with, "Folks!" They [Leandra and Raymond] keep talking and laughing, with Arthur involved now. Craig jokingly shouts, "Keep it down, I'm trying to work!" Leandra and Raymond continue to talk to Arthur.

Directing and Complying

In group-based classes, teachers gave directions that determined the activities in which the class engaged and guided the pace and rhythm of instruction. In highly individualized classes, the materials themselves conveyed direction, learners set their own pace, and the teacher functioned more as helper than as director. Typical directions guided elicitations and instructed learners to engage in instructional activities and to comply with such administrative requirements as signing-in or straightening the classroom.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, teachers selected the activities in every class we observed, and in the great majority of cases, learners complied with teachers' directions, which ranged from very direct and matter-of-fact to those with additional affective meaning.

When an activity was routine and nonthreatening, teachers typically delivered directions in a matter-of-fact, directive manner. In such cases, the purpose seemed primarily to convey the teacher's intentions for the activity. In the following example, learners had participated in the same writing lesson several times before and were well aware of the activity's form and purpose. If there is any affective overlay to the following directions, it is simply that the teacher is in control.

> The learners write down the words on notebook paper after each sentence. The teacher clues them in on testing strategies, i.e., which words are likely to be on the test. The teacher then asks the learners to take a few minutes to correct their own work and see how they did. The learners work quietly without interruptions.

In other cases, directions carried an affective as well as a directive message. For example, using tone and content, teachers often tried to reduce anxiety associated with tasks by making the task seem easy or nonthreatening. An example from one class illustrates this approach.

> The teacher says to the class, "What's an inventory?" Patricia responds, "Like a test of something." The teacher says, " Yeah, like a test. You're really testing yourself because you know that I am not going to take it home and mark it and give you a grade."

In some classes, teachers used humor in their directions to reduce social distance and allay potential anxiety.

> Jane asks several questions about how to fill out the EZ forms based on the case study packet enclosed in the packet. Alicia is having a very difficult time, and the

> teacher stops Cara and Marina as they are calling out answers. The teacher writes everything down on the board. She passes out more tax forms on which to solve problems as required. Marina realizes the room is very cold and asks if she can turn on the heat. The teacher jokes, "If Maria is not here to turn on the heat, we forget." They all laugh, as if this is a common occurrence.

Directions governed the pace and rhythm of instruction. When teachers were directing elicitations in conjunction with a lesson, a very common occurrence, the pace was typically rapid, with little opportunity for student-to-student interaction. Such was the case with directions given by a teacher in a workplace education class.

> *Teacher:* Okay, let's begin. Please look in your books *(using her hands to make sure they understand where to look).* Remember? We learned about safety? Let's review what we have learned already. *(She writes lists of safety-oriented terms on the blackboard. The students copy the words to their notebooks.)* Please repeat: Waste, area, caution, clean up, community, spills, accident, ignite, requires, proper way, disposal, handle, act quickly, catch, evaporate, vapors, breathe, solvent, absorb, granulate. *(The students repeat the words following the instructor pronunciation.)* Please go to Chapter 5, on page 35. Look at the picture, what do you see? "Clean-up of spills and disposal." *(She is reading the title from the booklet, accentuating every word.)*

In contrast, when learners were directed to read or write on their own, the pace slowed to accommodate individual differences in speed. Just as the pace of instruction varied within classes, it also varied among classes, with some moving at a rapid pace and others at a much slower pace. A suburban mixed-level class was rapid in its pace.

> After about five minutes, the teacher asks if the class is ready to take a crack at the sentences. Emit volunteers for the first sentence and identifies two of the grammar mistakes, and then the teacher takes over the remaining mistakes. The teacher gives the answer to the second sentence. She calls on Vanessa for the third sentence. Vanessa doesn't know the answer. The teacher provides it. The teacher asks the class for the next. No one answers. The teacher provides the answers. Evelyn comes in and takes a seat at the very far right in the first row. The teacher doesn't acknowledge her arrival, however, after a minute or two the teacher asks Evelyn to take a grammar hunt sheet when she has "caught her breath."

When the teacher-directed pace of the class was quite rapid, there was a risk that some learners would be left behind, and indeed, the incidence of nonresponses to the teacher's questions in the example above suggests that this may have been the case. In slower-moving classes there was a risk of boredom. For example, in a class in which the teacher had been called out of class frequently and the learners had

worked on a dictionary exercise for a considerable amount of time, the pace was quite slow, and at least one learner became bored.

> Rhonda looks in the dictionary while Anita and Sara spell. Referring to the word "lurch," the teacher says to the group of four, "Did you find it in the dictionary?" The woman who did not attend in the morning says, "My wish, let's get good dictionaries." She picks up one of the dictionaries and points, "In this dictionary the words are too small. It's old fashioned." The teacher responds, "It's old fashioned. Just like my house." One of the female students says, "Miss Tanner, it's boring in here."

When teachers directed learners to engage in an activity or asked learners to perform such administrative functions as signing-in, the most common response was compliance. In some cases, although learners complied, they met teachers' directions with mild rebellion. Learners sometimes protested when they felt an exercise was too difficult, as in the following case.

> The teacher tells the class that she wants to go over one more topic before the break: logic and organization of papers. From learners, there is a general expression of dismay regarding the difficulty of the activity. The teacher concedes that it can be tough going and that she "did not promise them a rose garden."

In some adult education contexts, protests over an activity a teacher proposed often led to negotiations between the teacher and learners. In the classes we observed, this never happened. Occasionally, learners refused to comply with teachers' directions. Most commonly, refusals occurred when the teacher directed learners to read, as in the following examples from two different classes.

> They stop to talk about a male character in the story who, they agree, got his name from not being too smart. Marsha reads. The teacher pauses to tell Patricia that it looks like her earlier prediction about the male character being a pimp is correct. Marsha reads for another minute and then the teacher says, "Go on, Barbara," but Barbara responds with, "I don't want to read." The teacher then asks Sally, who willingly continues to read.

> The teacher directs, "William, please read number two." He reads and answers. She then says, "Katherine, read number three." Katherine refuses. The teacher then asks Renaldo to read, and he does.

In the vast majority of cases, teachers simply ignored refusals and continued as if nothing had happened. In only one class was a refusal ever sanctioned, and in this case, the sanction was mild rebuke. In passing over refusals, it is possible that teachers were simply respecting learners' rights to refuse if they so chose.

Alternatively, it is possible that teachers feared negative sanctioning would unnecessarily interrupt the lesson and damage the harmony of the class, thus creating more harm than good.

The analysis of directing and complying raises the issue of the degree to which the classes we observed were either teacher-directed or learner-directed. Evidence of learner-directed processes was sparse. In one class, an anomaly, the teacher consistently encouraged learner-initiated discussion. In another class, which was essentially teacher-directed, there was a five-minute episode of a learner-initiated discussion. In a third class, learners chose their writing topics, and there was considerable discussion of the events depicted. Yet even in these three cases, teachers selected the classroom activities, directed learners to engage in them, and signaled the end of the activities.

Elicitation sessions that commonly followed lessons were highly teacher-directed, and as we noted previously, the emphasis was typically on learners supplying the correct answer. In the majority of cases, communication during instruction was teacher to learner and learner to teacher. Communication among learners generally occurred only in group work structured by the teacher or in conversations unrelated to instruction. Although in several cases learners were given alternatives for instruction, in no case did we observe teachers asking learners what they wanted to learn or how they wanted to learn it. Given this evidence, it is easy to conclude that adult literacy education is basically a teacher-directed enterprise, despite a wealth of literature that advocates learner-centeredness.

Yet when we consider teachers' goals for their teaching as expressed in Chapter Three—goals such as meeting learners' needs, establishing a trusting and safe classroom atmosphere, and helping learners solve life problems—the focus is on helping learners in ways that go considerably beyond teaching reading, writing, and math. Teachers say they are concerned with helping learners grow and develop and helping learners become successful. In this respect, teachers clearly intend to act in learner-centered ways.

If teachers intend to be learner-centered and they control the classroom, how can a teacher-directed rather than a learner-centered classroom result? We conclude that there are two intersecting meaning structures at work among teachers. On one hand, teachers are socialized to lead teacher-directed classes. Directing a class is what they know how to do. It is how they believe teachers are supposed to act. It is also what their learners expect. Indeed, it is what the educational system at large expects. For adult literacy education teachers, part of being a teacher has to do with

taking a teacher-directed approach, and that is so deeply instilled that many teachers may not be cognizant of it.

On the other hand, the meaning of being a teacher has a second dimension; in their attitudes, beliefs, and aspirations for their teaching, teachers are decidedly learner-centered. While adult literacy classes are primarily teacher-directed for all the reasons we have outlined, teachers behave in caring, supportive, learner-centered ways in their personal, affective relationships and interactions with learners. One dimension of this is the great extent to which most teachers attempted to reduce the social distance between themselves and their learners. In the following case, for example, a teacher reveals sensitive personal information about herself, most probably to reduce social distance.

> There is more discussion, and somehow it veers off into a discussion about how children learn from their parents. The teacher talks about her son, who now lives with his father. She says that when she lived with her ex-husband, they led totally separate lives, and had they continued to live together, her son would have defined marriage as living two separate lives. Because he now lives with his father and [his father's] second wife, who have a very solid marriage, he is getting a more positive definition of marriage.

Given that teachers intend to be learner-centered even if instruction is largely teacher-directed, we infer that being learner-centered in adult literacy education is not a teaching technology or teaching methodology based on the procedures, such as formal needs assessment, tailoring instruction to specific learner needs, and giving learners a voice in instructional decisions, that Fingeret & Jurmo (1989) or Gillespie (1989) advocate. Rather, a set of values revolving around caring and respect for learners guide teachers' interactions with their learners.

Correcting

Correcting is the act of rectifying learners' errors. In writing lessons, teachers suggested revisions that improved clarity and corrected spelling and grammar. In reading lessons, teachers corrected pronunciation and misread words, and in math lessons, teachers corrected incorrect answers to problems. In several classes in which teachers employed peer coaching, learners corrected each other.

When teachers corrected in response to lessons in which the material was not factual, they were more likely to employ a questioning, suggestive form of correction. This was common in writing lessons, in which learners' work was critiqued.

> The teacher begins calling on students to read from their writing journals. Several of the students read, and the teacher comments on their writing after each one finishes. After one student finishes, the teacher says, "Why do you think Ruby will keep her promise?" The student who has just read replies, "Because she has responsibility." The teacher then comments on the student's written piece *(speaking to the class)*, "She used good examples from the book." A second person reads, and again the teacher asks questions about the content of the piece.

In the great majority of cases, however, correction was routine, matter-of-fact, and focused on obtaining the correct, factual answer. Examples from two different classes demonstrate the point.

> Mary Beth continues to read aloud and pronounces "whilst" as "whistling." The teacher corrects her, pronouncing "whilst" and explaining to the class that it is dialect.

> Two learners had made mistakes on a math problem. The teacher says, "Pat, you had the division mark up there, and you are telling us something else when you read it." They correct Pat's mistake and then correct the other student's mistake. It turned out that both learners wrote down the wrong symbols but had done the math correctly.

Helping

As they taught, most teachers continuously monitored their class for signs that learners needed help and then provided help when it was apparent that learners required it. In addition, learners frequently asked for help either verbally or by raising their hands. When teachers suspected a learner might need help, they typically asked the learner.

> In order to promote their understanding of new vocabulary the teacher reminds students where to find the pictures that go with the terms. She says, "Rachel, do you need help?" Rachel says, "No." The teacher asks, "Stanley, do you need help?" Stanley does not respond. Nonetheless, the teacher helps him to rearrange the words.

Occasionally, teachers responded to learners' facial expressions or body language as signs that they needed help.

> The teacher asks Pamela what is wrong, in Spanish, because she is sitting at her desk not doing anything. Pamela explains that she has a headache, and the teacher and Pamela discuss the headache, in Spanish.

As the following examples attest, many learners were not reluctant to ask for help when they needed it.

> The teacher says, "For those of you who are comfortable, go ahead, but I don't want you to go too fast because some people are not finished." Douglas then asks for help.

> The teacher begins helping a learner. Another learner indicates that he needs help. Pleasantly, the teacher responds, "Martin, I will get there."

Although in a classroom observation study it was easy to observe teachers monitoring the need for help and learners requesting help, it was more difficult to identify cases in which learners needed help and did not receive it. As we noted in the section on tuning out, it could be that some tuning-out behavior signals help that is needed but not provided. It may also be that, in some cases, learners who needed help were too embarrassed to request it. In the following example, a learner requests to speak to the teacher privately about a problem with math, most likely because he was embarrassed to do so in front of the class.

> A male student approaches the teacher and asks to speak with her privately. They leave the room but speak loudly enough that the observer overhears. The learner is having difficulty with his multiplication tables. The teacher suggests that he use a calculator.

Although most help was rendered routinely, teachers sometimes encountered difficult cases that required special treatment, as in the following example in which a learner refused to work. In this case, the teacher tried to make the learner as comfortable as possible.

> The teacher walks in. She greets an older Black man him and tells him, "We've got some new programs in. You haven't worked on them yet." He tells her, "Not today" and asks to speak to her privately. They leave the room. The teacher and the older gentleman return. She tells him, "Do you think you will get comfortable? What do you want to work on?" He says, "Nothing. It's been a rough day." The teacher says, "I know what," and tells him she has something that will make him feel better. She leaves the room. After a minute or so she returns with orange slices. She places them on the table, where the older gentleman and I are sitting. She says, "Just watch out for the seeds."

Sometimes helping required a considerable amount of patience. In one case, the teacher was faced with a group of quite-young learners who were occasionally disruptive, including Jake, a learner who suffered from attention deficit disorder.

During a writing exercise, the teacher remained calm and persisted in her efforts to help, despite the interference.

> The teacher works on Jake's topic to serve as an example for the class. As she works with him on a possible essay outline, he jokingly tears up his paper saying, "That was not what I was working on." The teacher hides her frustration and keeps working on his topic on the blackboard. She finalizes Jake's outline and moves to Saundra, who is having difficulty.

Expressing Values, Attitudes, and Opinions and Exploring Ideas

In two thirds of the classes we observed, teachers rarely asked learners for their feelings, opinions, or beliefs, and in only 4 of our 20 sites was it common for them to probe for learners' opinions. If teachers asked learners for their opinions or learners expressed their own opinions, this was generally episodic and more of a brief aside than a part of the lesson or a segue to further discussion. In most classes, there was a marked absence of such language from teachers as, "What do you think?" or "How do you feel about?" If learners expressed opinions, it was often about the difficulty of a particular lesson, as in the following examples from two different classes.

> The teacher quiets the class and says she has the distinct feeling that they didn't like this worksheet. A learner refers to the paper as "mind-boggling."

> The class gives out a collective moan. While the teacher hands around some papers, Danielle makes a comment about losing television time doing this. The teacher says that Danielle will get no sympathy from her.

Why do adult literacy classrooms not serve as more fertile terrain for the discussion and sharing of ideas, attitudes, and opinions? As we sought to understand the answer, one class was particularly revealing. It was organized around a teacher-selected theme—immigration—and met four times a week for four hours per session. No new learners had been added recently, so the class was quite stable in comparison to many others we observed. When the learners—predominately first- or second-generation immigrants—had finished a reading passage on immigration, the teacher began to ask questions to assess comprehension.

> The teacher says, "What do we mean by immigrants?" There is no response. Then she asks, "Why would people pick up all their belongings and leave everything behind?" A learner volunteers, "Opportunity." A Haitian man than chimes in, "Money, obligation, right party." He then proceeds to explain why he immigrated to the United States. He had worked for an organization that helped poor people irrigate their land and was in charge of the operation. When Aristide was deposed, the government tried to arrest him [the learner]. He went into hiding, escaped to the

> Dominican Republic, and eventually came to the United States as a refugee. When he has finished, the teacher comments, "I didn't know this about you."

Here, the Haitian learner makes a very personal statement that is rich in experience and very relevant to the lesson as well. However, rather than integrating the account into the lesson, the teacher passes over the Haitian learner's statement and goes on to use the Irish potato famine as an example of forced immigration. The teacher then directs the class to read a handout on Ellis Island. Learners read aloud and the teacher asks questions.

> At some point, the passage refers to the Statue of Liberty. The poem on the statue is read by a learner: "Give me your poor, your wretched." The teacher asks what the poem means, rereads the poem with considerable passion, and concludes with, "Isn't that nice?" She then asks questions about the Statue of Liberty. She asks, " How do you think they felt when they saw the Statue of Liberty?" and "Do other countries welcome the poor as the United States has done? . . . the United States welcomes everybody." At one point, a learner says, "Well, not everybody," but the teacher doesn't react to the comment.

As the excerpt above suggests, the teacher seems to approach the lesson with an ideological frame that is idealistic and perhaps patriotic, a frame that might be characteristic of a grade school lesson. In the excerpts above, when the Haitian man and the learner interject alternative frames from their perspectives, the teacher passes over them, thus precluding what might have turned into a dialogic, thematic discussion that involved learner to learner interaction. As it turned out, all communication in this episode was teacher to learner, learner to teacher.

We suggest three interpretations of the general failure of teachers to bring learners' values, attitudes, and opinions into the instructional arena. First, in the class represented by the examples above, the teacher had prepared a well-planned lesson. Perhaps she believed that encouraging an open, free-ranging discussion would have been a deviation from her planned course, thus preventing her from accomplishing what she had intended in the class session.

Second, our interviews with teachers suggest that most are concerned with developing a positive learning climate. It could be that teachers equate a positive learning climate with harmony and are reluctant to interject sources of conflict that they fear they might not be able to control. Finally, it could be that teachers are more concerned with transmitting their own predominately middle-class values than they are with having values questioned in open discussion. Although this last possibility is an alternative to be considered, we found little evidence to support it.

Two weeks later, we again observed the class that had discussed immigration. During the period between observations, the class had taken a field trip to an immigration museum, and the teacher had asked the learners to describe the trip was to the observer. As learners gave their impressions, the following discussion ensued.

> The teacher asks, "Why would some Americans not welcome immigrants?" Sheila, a Black female, says "Because they own all the stinkin' stores. They have to go behind you in the store." She gestures, shakes her head and says, "Don't do that. Go back to your country." She then mimics an Asian accent. Some students laugh. The teacher says to an Asian learner, "They're not talking about you." Sheila continues. She says that they come into our neighborhoods and they think that we are garbage. They follow us around the stores as if we're going to steal. During Sheila's tirade, the Asian student says, "But, they're probably not talking about you." Sheila continues and is adamant about her feelings and experiences.
>
> Tarik, an African immigrant, breaks in and talks about people's "appearances" and good or bad dressing. Sheila looks at him warily. She dresses typically hip-hop—baggy jeans, untied sneakers, etc. Today, her hair is in braids. On previous days, she had a kerchief covering her scalp. Tarik dresses in casual jeans and sweater.
>
> Tarik concludes that, "If you treat yourself well, others will treat you well." Sheila will still not accept that answer and tells Tarik so. Others in the class are participating in the discussion. The observer cannot keep track of what they are saying. However, some students seem uncomfortable and begin telling the teacher to go on to something else.
>
> The teacher says, "No, no. Let's continue. What's the problem? What's Sheila talking about?" Tarik indicates that most American people do not want to work. This leads to more animated discussion in the class. Some of the students take his comment personally. The teacher attempts to get the class to refocus. "What is the problem?" Daniel replies that the problem is communication. He says that different people have different customs. ". . . putting money on the table, rather than in your hand." The teacher asks him if he means the Hasidic Jews, whose culture does not allow them to hand money to others in their hands. Daniel replies that they are only one of the groups whose customs have to be understood. He continues that there are "a lot of general things" being said about people.

Here, we have an example of one of the very few spontaneous, open discussions we witnessed in our 40 observations. Moreover, the discussion occurred in a class in which, one week before, the teacher had discouraged this kind of discussion. During the second observation, the discussion was a virtual blizzard of learners' values and opinions and replete with the sharing of ideas. We believe it is no accident that the discussion occurred during time that the teacher had specifically allocated for a debriefing of the field trip. It may be that the teacher felt discussion

was appropriate for a debriefing, while in contrast, in the first class we observed, the teacher considered it a diversion from the planned lesson.

This discussion is also an example of the kind of acrimonious interchange that can occur when learners have differing, highly charged values. Some teachers may fear this kind of discussion and seek to discourage it out of concern that they may not be able to control it. Because in this case the teacher met with the class 16 hours per week and enrollment was quite stable, she knew the learners very well and may have felt secure about letting the discussion continue.

Functioning as a Community

To this point, we have discussed classroom processes as discrete and separate themes. However, a group of processes seem linked by the concept of community. This term has several meanings. It often refers to a location, as in a neighborhood. It is also used to refer to groups with common characteristics and interests.

Consistent with the literature on community in schools (Osterman, 2000), we define a community as a sense of belonging or relatedness among members. Specifically, "Community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (McMillan and Chavis, 1986, p. 9). Additionally, for community as defined to develop, members must trust others and feel safe (Furman, 1998).

Although most classes we observed had at least some episodes indicative of community, these episodes were common and pervasive in only about a quarter of the classes. Almost by definition, highly individualized classes tended to lack the characteristics that define community. Because we observed each class only twice, it was difficult to determine the extent to which community was institutionalized in any given class.

We were unable to do the more thorough analysis of community that would have required us to interview learners, but our observations made it quite possible to infer community from what teachers and learners said and did. For example, a class in New England that wrote a poem demonstrated the atmosphere of belonging and unity that comes from a successful group effort.

> The aide suggests taking away some words. The teacher is at the easel with Arlene. Bertha and the aide watch on. The teacher asks Arlene to rewrite the new revisions below. The observer comments, "The room is very quiet. Everyone seems

> engaged. There is a feeling of group unity, like they are really creating something wonderful—and I think they are right."

When the poem was finished, the learners collectively expressed their pleasure.

> Bertha has another revision suggestion. The teacher encourages her. They all joke and smile as Arlene writes. She finishes and reads it. Everyone claps. The teacher says, "We should submit it."

In another class, in which the learners were working on math, the lunch hour was supposed to begin at noon. Instead of breaking, however, the class, as a group, asked to continue working and did so until 12:25, 25 minutes into their lunch hour. During this episode, the teacher functioned not only as a guide, but also as a member of the group.

> It is now a few minutes after 12:00—their scheduled lunch time. Anita, a learner, asks if they can do another problem. The class agrees. Teresa, another learner, wants to finish the rest of the page [another round of problems], and they all agree. I go to watch another learner; she does her problem, a division of fractions, perfectly. As the class works on these last problems, the teacher says, "Hey, guess what? The way you all are doing these, it looks like you've mastered this. What do you think, Kathy?" "I readily agree!" she replies. The teacher says, "I feel so good; I don't see anybody really struggling. We're going on to decimals next."

In a third class, in which the teacher and all the learners were women, learners clearly felt safe to discuss topics that in other contexts would be taboo.

> Frances is reading what she had written. She reads, "He asked if he could come in because I don't have any man in my house." The teacher responds, "What was that?" Another learner says to Frances, "Because Jeff's your man?" Frances continues to read her story, explaining that the man kept insisting that he wanted a glass of water. She ends the story with, "He asked if he could see my chest. I said no. I don't want to see him again. Do you know why? Because he is ugly." The teacher says, "Is that the only reason?" The learners respond to the story. The teacher says, "You have so many guys coming on to you." Frances says, "I wrote another 'bout the pharmacy guy." The teacher responds, "Oh, the pharmacy guy."

Three classroom practices seemed to be associated with community: learners collaborating with other learners, teachers' support of a community environment, and inclusion. The association between learners collaborating with other learners and community is well established in the literature of elementary and secondary education (Johnson et al., 1983), as is the relationship between teachers' support and

community (Osterman, 2000). The relationship between inclusion and community is a theme in the literature of popular education and adult education (Beder, 1996; Imel, 1995).

Learners Collaborating with Other Learners

In some cases, learner collaboration occurred spontaneously, without prompting from the teacher. Clearly, norms had developed in the class that supported such activity. Two different math classes provide examples.

> Sally asks the teacher for help on her problem. After the teacher moves on, Sally returns from putting her math problem on the blackboard and asks Susan for help. The observer comments, "Students are very willing to help each other. There is no pressure from the teacher to do this; it seems to come naturally for all of them."

> The teacher is moving from table to table, helping learners as necessary. She is working primarily with four learners who are sitting at desks located in the middle of the room. Learners seem to be interacting well with each other. Shana gets up and goes to the desk of another woman and begins to help her with a math equation. The other woman asks, "How do we do it?" Shana responds, "Now you multiply."

In other cases, collaboration occurred because the teacher directed the learners to engage in collaborative activity.

> The teacher tells the class she is going to give them six or seven minutes and asks them to form two groups. She asks group one to come up with a list of positive aspects of their community and group two to come up with negative aspects. She reminds the students that they are not to write the essay but just to jot down ideas and talk about them. She reminds them that they have about five or six minutes and that the actual essay is going to be due after vacation.

A relationship between collaboration and community raises the question of whether collaboration promotes community or whether community produces collaboration. We infer that the answer is that they are interactive. It is difficult to conceive of a community, as defined here, in which the members do not interact meaningfully. Clearly, learner collaboration provides the opportunity for such interaction. On the other hand, the norms of trust and safety requisite for community are likely to support and provide encouragement for learner collaboration, especially the kind of collaboration that occurs spontaneously.

Although learner collaboration is an important component of community, it was uncommon in the classes we observed, especially in many of the classes we have termed decontextualized discrete skill instruction. The episodes of

collaboration that we observed were generally short in duration, and in no class did we find teams with stable membership working together on long-term projects. We surmise that continuous enrollment and high absenteeism are at least part of the reason for this, as it is very difficult to create stable work teams that stay together over time when the membership of the class changes often.

Teacher Support of a Community Environment

In her review of the literature on community and schooling, Osterman (2000) notes the following about teachers' support.

> To experience relatedness, students must feel that they are worthy of respect and that others in their group or social context care for them. Their beliefs about themselves develop through their interactions. If interactions are positive and affirming, students will have a stronger sense of self-relatedness. This in turn reinforces and encourages similar behavior. On the contrary, if experiences are negative, if students receive information that they are not valued and that their behavior is not welcome, their sense of relatedness suffers. (p. 357)

It was clear from our interviews with teachers that they considered it important to develop supportive relationships with learners and to create open, respectful, and trusting classroom environments. Indeed, this is one of the central findings of Chapter Three. Teacher support was also evident in our observations. As noted earlier, to maintain a nurturing atmosphere, teachers were liberal in their use of praise and very rarely sanctioned learners negatively.

Another form of teacher support of a community environment was expression of caring at a personal level. These expressions help build and reinforce a caring atmosphere in the classroom. The following is one of many examples.

> They [teacher and learner] begin to talk about personal matters, like a learner with the headache needing glasses and having her eyes tested. The student excitedly speaks of becoming a secretary. The teacher advises them to talk to their program managers and decide when they are to take the GED or the medical training program.

In still another form of support, teachers and learners shared information about themselves, an act that leveled the social distance between teachers and learners and could build trust.

> It is coffee break. Students have brought in hot water for coffee and tea, as well as cookies. They seem to be very supportive and have a personal relationship with the

> teacher. Josslyn asks some questions about the teacher's husband and indicates that she was aware that the teacher's son had had problems with this car.

As a third form of support, teachers attempted to reduce the perception that they were authority figures, to be perceived as being with the class rather than over the class. In two classes, for example, when the teacher asked the learners to write, she wrote along with them. In several classes, we witnessed playful banter that seemed to convey the message that the teacher was a friend rather than an authority figure. Below is one example of this kind of interaction.

> The teacher is distributing the local paper. Once everyone has a copy, the teacher focuses on the headline about the deep decline in the stock market the previous day. He talks to the class about his stocks. His grandmother left him a small inheritance, and he calculates that he probably lost about $2,450 the previous day. There is a lot of yelling from the learners with such comments as, "You should have sold," and "You should have given it to me."

Although most teachers made at least some effort to support an environment conducive to community, actually developing community was not easy. Continuous enrollment and high absenteeism often created a very dynamic environment in terms of class membership, and this sometimes impeded teachers and learners from getting to know each other well, especially in classes that met only a few hours per week. Moreover, unlike in elementary, secondary, and higher education, in adult literacy education, there is no larger school environment that can engage learners and facilitate development of networks of affiliation and belonging that can transfer to class.

Inclusion

Inclusion is the process of incorporating new learners into the class and helping them feel they belong to the group. It is important if community is to be purposefully constructed. Inclusion was a particular issue in classes with continuous enrolllment, in which new learners arrived constantly. In the classes we studied, formal introductions or other planned inclusion activities were very rare. Indeed, for the most part new learners were all but ignored, as the following example demonstrates.

> A woman enters with papers, and the teacher says to her, "Why don't you just take a seat because I don't really have time to deal with the testing right now." The woman takes a seat in one of the front rows. She takes out a notebook but doesn't take her coat off, and the teacher continues with the lesson.

Even in classes with a relatively high level of community, such as the class in the following example, new learners were not formally inducted into the group and were expected to engage on their own. This is what happened to Anna on her first day.

> Belinda arrives, followed by Anna, a new student on this day. The teacher immediately tells her about the library table in the back of the classroom where students choose books to take home and read to their children. The teacher says to Anna, "You can pick two or three." Anna goes to the table and chooses several. The teacher says to Anna, "We give awards to the student who reads the most books to children at home." Before Anna can respond, she is interrupted by a lively version of "The Star Spangled Banner," followed by elementary school announcements over the school intercom. The teacher then introduces Anna to the observer, but not to the class. *(A bit later)* The teacher asks Anna if she has a notebook. She gets her one, along with a dictionary and thesaurus, explaining that the dictionary and thesaurus stay under the desk and do not go home with the students. The intercom interrupts with another announcement. The teacher says to Anna, "Okay, let's see if you can find 'vane' in here." *(Referring to the dictionary)* The teacher has her look it up and copy the definition. The teacher says, "Then see if you can find it here [the thesaurus.] . . . these are synonyms—it's a thesaurus." Anna nods and looks slightly puzzled. The teacher leaves her alone to do her work.
>
> *(A little later)* The teacher brings Anna some forms to fill out. The teacher helps her with her work first and tells her to do the forms when she's done with her work. The teacher asks several questions of the class. As Marsha reads a response from the book, all students (except Anna, who's working in her notebook) follow along. The teacher tells Anna to turn to page 171, saying, "You can work on those forms later, okay?" Anna and the rest of the class follow along in their books—except for Belinda, who's eating. *(The reading lesson continues.)* The teacher says, "What do you think about it, Anna? What do you think about the story so far—any comments?" Anna shakes her head no. The teacher goes right on, and Belinda gives her opinion. Several minutes later, the class ends.

Although the teacher in the above example briefly orients Anna to some aspects of classroom process, Anna is not introduced to the class either formally or informally. With respect to the class as a social group, Anna is expected to engage on her own.

Although it was beyond the scope of our study to measure the impact of community on students' learning gains, a wealth of literature from elementary and secondary education suggests that various aspects of community have a positive effect on learning. Community has been shown to reduce the probability of dropping out (Elliot & Voss, 1974; Parker & Asher, 1987), increase engagement in learning

(Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Freese, 1999; Wentzel, 1998), and positively affect school achievement (Green et. al., 1980; Jules, 1991; Ladd, 1990; Taylor, 1989). Because community may be an important factor in adult literacy as well as in elementary and secondary education, it is important to discuss the factors that facilitate and impede community.

Factors that Facilitate Community

It is no accident that in most of the classes exhibiting a high level of community, there was a special element of communality that revolved around gender, ethnicity, background, or parenting. Two high-community classes were family literacy classes in which the teacher and all the learners were female, and learners had children in the childhood education component. Another high-community class was one in which the teacher and learners were female, and all the learners were from the same community and on welfare. Still another high-community class was composed exclusively of relatively new immigrants who shared their cultural experiences together, and another was composed solely of learners predominantly of Puerto Rican heritage. Commonality seemed to promote learners' identification with the class as a group. It also provided the basis for social interaction.

Out-of-class activities, such as field trips, parties, and family literacy-sponsored parent education programs were other activities that fostered community. Field trips in which parents and children participated were common in family literacy classes. In a class in which most of the women received public assistance, the learners had searched for jobs together. Another class went on a field trip to an immigration museum in conjunction with the class theme of immigration. Several of the high-community classes we observed planned Christmas parties. Although we did not observe out-of-class activities, it is easy to surmise that they provided an opportunity for learners to interact on a personal and social level and to bond as a group.

Another factor that seemed to promote community was teachers' deliberate efforts to interject the kind of activities that build community. For example, in one high-community class, the teacher required learners to exchange journals during writing exercises. During one of our observations of this class, learners worked in peer-coaching pairs for most of the session. In another high-community class, a teacher who stated that building community was one of her goals had the class write and perform a play.

Factors that Impede Community

Our observations suggested that some elements contributed to the development of community, but they also pointed to two aspects of adult literacy education that were particularly damaging to community: continuous enrollment and large classes. In classes in which new learners enrolled constantly as others dropped out, learners had difficulty learning each other's names, let alone developing community. Moreover, given the constant influx and learner attrition, it was difficult for teachers to employ techniques that seemed to promote learner interaction, such as peer coaching, or to learn about their learners' out-of-class lives. In large classes, it was considerably more difficult for teachers and learners to know each other on a personal basis.

CHAPTER SIX: SHAPING FACTORS

To a very significant extent, the classroom dynamics we have portrayed in the preceding chapters were shaped by three strong forces. We have termed these enrollment turbulence, funding pressure, and classroom composition. Enrollment turbulence is caused by high dropout rates, which, according to the National Evaluation of Adult Education Programs (1994), are about 40 percent after 6 hours of instruction and 80 percent after 24 hours of instruction. Funding pressure includes insufficient funding, the effects of differing eligibility requirements, and regulations associated with funding sources. Classroom composition refers to the age, ethnic, and gender composition of the class.

Enrollment Turbulence

Typically, the classes we studied ran in cycles roughly equivalent to semesters. At the beginning of a cycle, usually in the early fall and late winter, enrollment was at its peak. As time passed and learner attrition took its toll, new enrollees were added to the class to compensate for those who had left. The result was continuous enrollment, with new learners arriving on a weekly or even daily basis. As noted earlier, new learners were seldom introduced to the class. Very often, they merely took a seat and were expected to engage on their own, with only cursory acknowledgement from either the teacher or other learners.

Continuous enrollment made it very difficult for programs to organize classes around learners' skill levels. For example, when GED classes experienced learner attrition and insufficient numbers of learners at this level sought enrollment, learners with lower skill levels were added. The result was not only continuous enrollment but mixed skill levels as well. Indeed, in the majority of GED classes we observed, learners' skill levels ranged from near nonreaders to those who were ready to pass the GED tests.

In mixed-level, continuous enrollment classes, the teacher was faced with the difficulty of focusing instruction at the appropriate skill level and creating a stable classroom community. Teachers whose training and experience was in elementary or secondary education, in which students are grouped into relatively homogeneous grades and the same students are present throughout the school year, were very poorly equipped to deal with these problems. An evening GED class provides an example. When we first observed this class, there were eight learners who had paid a fee of $175 to enroll. Enrollment was stable. When we observed the class a second time, the next cycle had begun. In the space of several weeks, the class—now funded through federal funds—had been transformed into a mixed-level,

continuous enrollment class with 14 learners. The experienced but exasperated adult literacy teacher shared her thoughts on the situation.

> *Interviewer:* So, this class is somewhat different . . .
> *Teacher:* Well, you see, it's so much bigger. We have to take everyone. It used to be that if I got someone on the seventh-grade reading level, it was unusual. Now, they are all over the map. Some have real learning disabilities; some are on the second-grade level. I say, how am I supposed to teach? For example in math, at this point, I am finishing up percents, and I'm moving into algebra, and these people [the learners] don't even know 2 + 2, and they're just supposed to slide right in? This is just not going to work. I was told you just do the same thing that you would do if you were in a regular high school. In a regular high school program, you came from an algebra program, you go into an algebra program. I am so stressed out that I cannot even set up the attendance books. I can't start sending warning notices for no-shows. I said [to the administration] that there aren't enough hours in the day. I mean, I can't do it all. There are some days when I get so frustrated with a group. The other day, I said, "I have to walk out of here." I said to the class, "How many times have you heard me say 'Does my answer make sense?'" Here are some of the answers I got: 50 percent of 28 was 44 . . .

There were essentially three instructional responses to mixed-level, continuous enrollment classes. The first was individualized instruction, in which learners worked individually at their own pace on sequenced materials geared to their skill level. Although highly individualized instruction compensated for mixed levels, it also required learners to work effectively in an independent mode. As one teacher explained, this was sometimes problematic.

> Here, we work independently. Everyone has to be working independently. Our biggest problem is when we get people who can't work independently. My biggest problem is when people are lower level. These people need constant attention, and it's just an impossible situation.

Moreover, in individualized instruction, it was critical for learners to receive individual help when they needed it. Otherwise, their learning became stalled, and they became frustrated. In large classes with insufficient staffing, rendering adequate help was difficult if not impossible.

A second option was for teachers to gear group-based instruction to one level and hope that learners at other levels would somehow benefit. This was true of several mixed-level, continuous enrollment GED classes in which the teacher focused instruction on content needed to pass the GED tests, apparently believing it was her responsibility to do so. In one such class, in which only one third of the

learners were actually at the secondary skill level, two thirds of the class was virtually left out of the instructional process.

The third response was a blend of individualized and group-based instruction, in which learners sometimes worked individually on materials geared to their skill levels and the teacher sometimes delivered short lessons to learners grouped according to their skill level. As one can imagine, this was very difficult in large classes.

Based on everything we observed in classes and heard from teachers, mixed levels and continuous enrollment are very serious problems over which teachers have very little control and with which most teachers simply cannot cope effectively. This contributes to teacher burnout. A teacher of a mixed-level GED class that had become very large because of continuous enrollment described her experience.

> It [the class] was unusually overcrowded. What it did was, it wore me out. I don't usually stop class at about 8:30, but I just found that if I try to make it any longer, I might have lost it or just be wiped out. It makes it very difficult to move around the room and look over their shoulders to see what they're doing. I try to stay very up and not let them know that it might be getting to me because I want to keep them trying. And when they come in—as you saw, one lady came in and then just took off [because there were not enough seats], and the other gentleman who came late, I told him to grab a chair from another room and come in, because they will go home.

There may be consequences to mixed-level, continuous enrollment classes even more damaging than teacher burnout. We suspect that a great deal of the tuning-out behavior we previously noted was a consequence of learners either unable to understand too-difficult lessons or bored because instruction was too easy. Both are direct byproducts of mixed levels. It may also be that tuning out is symptomatic of impending dropping out. If this is true, and additional research is needed to confirm it, there may be a vicious cycle in adult literacy education: High attrition rates lead to mixed-level, continuous enrollment classes which, in turn, contribute to learner dropout.

Although most teachers seemed to understand that mixed-level, continuous enrollment classes placed major constraints on their ability to teach effectively, only a few of the 20 teachers we interviewed complained bitterly about it. This may be because teachers have come to accept mixed levels and continuous enrollments as part of the nature of adult literacy education.

Funding Pressure

Funding pressure is a second major influence on adult literacy education classes. Funding affects what happens in the classroom in at least two ways. First, funding source regulations and eligibility requirements determine who will be served and, in some cases, the type of instruction learners will receive. Second, the amount of funding affects such things as the amount of available instruction and class size. A teacher in a suburban program explained how funding requirements and regulations influenced her class.

> The center offers different training options. The state sends us some of our clients, as well as determining how long they have to be trained. The welfare students are limited by time. They have to find a job within a certain time. They can enter every Monday. This means that students are at different levels within their 12 weeks at different times. They can ask for more time, but it is not guaranteed. . . . Some people are also sent to us by PIC. PIC will also limit the amount of time a student can participate. Some students are from unemployment. Some come to us from SPOC, which is the Single Point of Contact. SPOC is a program established for single women and women under financial duress. We also have programs in training, medical, and clerical. We also have some youth in the program. PIC also places several students. They may come to PIC as a result of a layoff.

When programs were funded through the Department of Social Services, learners' attendance was often mandated. Some teachers believed that the mandatory aspect resulted in less-motivated learners. A teacher of this type of class recounted her experience.

> A lot of things that I wanted to do met with real serious resistance. They didn't want to read, like, for three months—they wouldn't read. Well, like, they wouldn't read cooperatively. They wouldn't read voluntarily. They wouldn't want to read out loud. You know what I mean? A few people would read—no one else would read any type of thing. And then they wouldn't write. They wouldn't write for, like, six months. I had to wait a long time until they got into a space where they're willing to do it.

Another teacher expressed a similar sentiment.

> Some students did take advantage of the program, but there were a few students who said right out, "I'm only here because I have to be here." But we had both extremes, and that was not very pleasant. So the people in the program now are here voluntarily, and that makes a large difference in motivation.

Welfare reform has had a substantial impact in most states. Before the last major reform mandated by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act of 1996, one of the welfare-sponsored family literacy classes we studied served parents on welfare whose children also participated in the early childhood education component. However, when the state moved to a work-first welfare policy, the great majority of learners were forced to leave the program to take jobs. To retain a viable enrollment, volunteer learners from the community were recruited. At the time we observed the class, it still had not adjusted to this major change. The teacher of this class explained the situation:

> We had more mothers, single mothers—or I shouldn't say only single. We had married mothers, too, whose children attended next door [the childhood education component]. We also at that point had some males, but the majority of people were coming because the state agencies sent them here to study. Now we are being told that they have to go for jobs. So there is no one to allow them to have time for study. I preferred it the other way. The children were in a type of daycare situation that was paid for. They didn't have to worry about it. Transportation to get here was not a problem. They were supported financially to get here and to remain here.

In family literacy classes funded by Even Start, children were sometimes present, and as one teacher explained, this caused disruption that sometimes made instruction difficult.

> But, I'm really conflicted and ambivalent because I've been working for a couple of weeks with kids in the classroom and before that, four months, and I mean I can do it, but I don't . . . I don't . . . don't like it, and I don't think it helps their [the adults'] learning. I see it in conflict with the adults' learning and my teaching. Even if the adults aren't as conscious of it. Like, maybe that's my own agenda 'cause they're so used to doing everything with their kids—they have to—um, but part of the structure of this program was to free up the adults for a few hours so they could learn and then come together, but if there's none of that separating out, the learning just happens slower. Of course, other learning happens, but the learning that I want, that we've agreed that they're here to do, to get—some kind of their own literacy skills, their GED—and it just takes longer. So, and then I am distracted because I'm tired, and then I feel like I'm not keeping things on track in the same way if I'm also dealing with the kids.

The amount of funding also affected instruction in important ways. In some cases, funding was based on enrollment. If enrollment declined, so did the funding. For example, in a family literacy class, the adult literacy education teacher was laid off because enrollment had declined, and when we observed the class, a social worker with no training in adult literacy was teaching it. He shared some comments on the situation:

> And at one point, we didn't have enough numbers to keep her [the adult literacy teacher], you know, have her contracted to come out here. . . . They let her go, and she told all the people in our program that the program was shutting down, which was not an appropriate statement, and I had to spend a whole month reeling people back in because she had told them this. And so, we've had our problems in the program, and it's grant funded, and we have a lot of needs and requirements that we are supposed to meet. But, you know, these are things that I had talked with my supervisor about, but we had a hard time because she did not hire staff in the numbers that were written in the grant for us.

The amount of funding often determined how much time was available for instruction. Programs funded through family literacy or welfare tended to meet 15 to 20 hours per week, and evening programs funded through the U.S. Department of Education funds often met only 6 hours per week. In one GED-preparation class we observed, seating was in rows, but no one sat in the two rows in the center of the room. When we asked why, the teacher explained that learners were only funded for a 12-week cycle. The cycle had just ended for the group of learners previously seated in the empty rows, and the learners had not yet adjusted to the loss by filling the empty seats.

Classroom Composition

The composition of a class with respect to gender, age, and ethnicity is the third important factor shaping classroom dynamics. When classes were relatively homogeneous—when the teacher and all the learners were female, for example—the commonality seemed to promote sharing and community. When classes were diverse, particularly with respect to ethnicity, there was a greater opportunity for cross-cultural learning and occasionally for intercultural conflict as well.

Gender

The influence of gender was particularly evident in a welfare-sponsored class in which the teacher, the learners, and the observer were all female. The teacher's name was Angela. In her class, women's issues were threaded through all aspects of instruction and provided a commonality that augmented a high level of community. Reading and writing topics were related to gender issues. Learners freely discussed their relationships with men, and "sex talk" was not taboo, as it more likely would have been in a mixed-gender class. Gender, in Angela's class, provided the thematic basis for social interaction. Although discussion was sometimes heated, after episodes of acrimony, the balance of the class was quickly restored, and instruction resumed.

In the following excerpt from Angela's class, a learner had just finished reading aloud a short piece she had written.

> After she has read her piece she says, "That's why I don't have any female friends. You cannot put your trust in them." A heated discussion ensues. At some point during the discussion, Carla tries to clarify her point. She says that she has confided in women, and that they then betray her confidence and gossip about her. Another verbal melee ensues. Different women say, "They all don't . . .," "You can't say that . . .," "Men talk, too, . . .," "Male friends are . . ." The woman against the wall says that her mother had many men friends. She made sure to clarify that they were friends and not lovers. They were always coming to her house when she was a child. These men were just friends to her mother, but they would sit in the living room talking and bad-mouthing other women. She was making the point that men gossip just as often as women do.
>
> Carla gets defensive and says that men may have talked about her mother, but in her experience, it has been women who had done the gossiping. She makes it clear that this has been her experience. At some point, Angela interjects that she believes that women do gossip more than men, so "I can respect Carla's opinion." Carla says fairly loudly and in a somewhat intimidating way, "Everyone is entitled to their own opinion." A student to my right responds, "Maybe you shouldn't talk so loud." Carla says even louder, "See, that's why I don't like bitches." Julia, the Puerto Rican student, glares at Carla and says, "Do you see where you took it?" Carla responds, "Yes, 'cause I wanted to take it there."

Although Carla borders on belligerence in this excerpt, she felt comfortable expressing her voice, and the other learners joined the discussion freely and naturally. Angela's class was one of the few we observed in which learners interacted outside of class as well as inside. At one point, for example, they had written a play together, and, on one occasion, they had visited employers as a group seeking jobs. In this case, gender homogeneity clearly influenced the development of community in a positive and significant way.

Age

Although in most classes learners' ages ranged from the early 20s on up, with learners in their mid-20s to their mid-40s predominating, one class included a group of young, recent high school dropouts whose presence created a source of considerable disruption. An administrator explained why these recent dropouts had been placed in an adult class rather than in a special class for youth.

> *Interviewer:* I noticed that in both of the classes I observed there were youths, and sometimes it was a little like a zoo.

Administrator: We used to place the youth in the same class. However, one group destroyed the computer lab. Most of the all-youth classes were terrible. So we split them up and placed them in adult classes so that the more mature adults can model for them.

In one instance, we can see several young learners' seemingly immature behavior, which leads the teacher off-task and annoys other learners. The class has 11 learners on the observed day, 8 in their late 20s or early 30s and 3 young recent dropouts. As the class begins, only three learners are present. The following is an abbreviated account of what happened during one of our observations.

> Olivia, the first of the youths to arrive, enters about 10 minutes late, and in a friendly manner, the teacher asks her if she planned to take the GED tests soon. Olivia tells the teacher "no" and takes her seat. The teacher begins a geometry lesson. Fifteen minutes into the class, the teacher asks, "Where are all the men?" referring to three young males who had not yet arrived. The geometry lesson continues. At 10:05, an hour into the class, the first of the young males arrives.

The field notes indicate the following:

> Jose, a young male dressed in jeans and a t-shirt, enters the room. He attempts to sneak in. The teacher immediately asks him, "Where are your buddies? Stephan and Arthur are both missing." He offers no answer and goes to a seat in the back next to Olivia.
>
> Then, five minutes later, another youth, Arthur, arrives, and the other learners laugh. Sitting next to Jose, he remarks, "I got up at 9:40." The teacher exclaims, "Arthur!" and goes on to warn him that if he is continually late the administration "will be on my case." Jose says, "I was not with him chillin', I was in my bed chillin'." Olivia and Jose chat to themselves, and Arthur occasionally joins in. Several times the teacher says, "Let's calm down." The teacher calls Olivia to her desk, ostensibly for individual work but also perhaps to break up the youthful threesome. When the teacher asks Olivia when she dropped out of high school, she sullenly responds, "Obviously I did not graduate, or I would not be here." Olivia returns to her seat and continues her conversation with Jose and Arthur.
>
> Olivia pokes Jose with her pen, and they continue to laugh and whisper. About 10 minutes later, Olivia shouts to Jose, "I'll stick my hand down your pants," and Jose responds, "I'll stick my hand down your pants." The teacher exclaims, "Folks!" The three keep talking. The teacher says, "Come on!" Another student complains, "Keep it down, I'm trying to work." The class continues with the three youths, Olivia, Jose, and Arthur, doing very little work and disrupting the work of others for most of the session.

Ethnicity and Race

In the northeast and California, large proportions of the adult literacy learners were foreign born (not ESOL), and this was true at all skill levels. Although Hispanic learners predominated among the foreign born, there also were Asian, African, and European learners. Classes of mixed ethnicity sometimes provided the opportunity for cross-cultural interaction, and when this happened, it enriched instruction. In a class sponsored by a community college, for example, the class read a newspaper article about stalking.

> Ralph finishes reading two paragraphs. The teacher asks, "Why would somebody be a stalker?" Ralph replies, "Excuse my French, but maybe he hasn't gotten enough." The teacher looks surprised. Other female students seem surprised by his answer. The teacher then asks Ralph to imagine if it happened to him—how would he feel? Iris says that she was stalked in Jamaica. She then describes how she was almost pulled into an alley, and she left in a taxicab. Stanley describes how he received harassing phone calls for several weeks. The teacher asks, "Why is stalking much more serious for women?" There is a discussion about physical force and the strength of men.
>
> The teacher called upon Tarik and asked him if he were familiar with any stalking situations. He said that when he still lived in the tribal village in his country in Africa, that another man was stalking his sister. Although he did not rape her, he "touched" her. He said that the men in his family then set off to kill the man. They killed him. The class, on the whole, seems horrified. Tarik calmly says that that was what had to be done. He says that he doesn't expect the other students to understand because he comes from a completely different culture than the rest of the students. It is isolated. There are no police. What the men in his family did had to be done to protect his sister.

In several classes, teachers selected reading material that they believed would have particular interest to Black learners, as one teacher describes below.

> One goal I had was to introduce or reintroduce the writing of Zora Neale Hurston . . . so one was a literature goal, to get this writing to people because it's good writing and important writing, I think. I determine that. And the other is the sort of women in the class. The students have the chance to see that there's canons of published work by women, and some of the women in the class are of similar backgrounds of the women, so that felt very important too.

Although a class of mixed race and ethnicity was an asset to teachers who used it as an opportunity for enriching instruction, intercultural conflict created

difficult situations for the teachers. In one class of mixed race and ethnicity, the following decidedly racist encounter occurred among learners.

> At some point, the Black woman who is sitting to the right of the teacher shifts the discussion from the Puerto Rican woman's parents to all Hispanic parents. She prefaces her statement by saying that she is not saying that she believes this is true, but this is what she has *heard*. What she has heard is that in Hispanic homes, like Puerto Rican homes, when a girl gets a boyfriend and is getting ready to marry, the father "breaks them in." Again, she emphasizes that this is what she has heard and that she is not necessarily saying that this is true. Someone asks her why a father would do this, and she says its about showing her how to have sexual pleasure. The Puerto Rican woman is incensed and says, "Are you saying that I will hand over my daughter to my husband and allow him to have sex with her? I'll kill him first. I've never heard of anything like that."

Stability

One of the critical issues raised by our portrayal of shaping factors is the issue of classroom stability. Enrollment turbulence, mixed skill levels, large enrollments, and restrictions caused by funding eligibility are sources of interference and instability that make it very difficult for classes to function as effective social systems.

Because of enrollment turbulence, teachers find it difficult to form close relationships with learners and to develop a sense of community. It is also difficult for teachers to employ complex teaching methods, such as peer coaching or project-based learning, because these methods require learners to develop shared meanings regarding the method's purpose and procedures. Clearly, in turbulent, unstable classroom environments in which learners constantly come and go, development of shared meaning is thwarted. We believe that it is no accident that the classes in which traditional lessons were supplemented with project-based learning, peer coaching, field trips, and/or open, free-flowing discussion were relatively stable.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, we present our conclusions and implications for policy, practice, and research. Our implications derive directly from our findings and the research questions that guided the study. Those questions are:

- What is the content of instruction and how is content structured?
- What social processes characterize the interactions of teachers and learners in the classroom?
- What forces outside the classroom shape classroom behavior?

Under each heading of this chapter is a cross-reference to the pages in which we presented our findings.

The Content and Structure of Instruction

[The Content and Structure of Instruction, pp. 39–61]

In every class that we observed, a lesson was the basic unit of instruction. In group-based instruction, lessons were universally prepared and delivered by the teacher. In individualized instruction, lessons were embodied in the instructional materials learners used. The great majority of lessons followed a format described by Mehan (1979) in an observational study of elementary education.

As in Mehan's study, lessons began with the teacher opening the lesson by directing the learners to do an activity, typically a reading, writing, math, or GED-based instruction exercise. When the exercise was complete, it was followed by an elicitation sequence comprised of a series of teacher-posed questions and learners' responses. During the elicitation, teachers determined from learners' responses whether they had correctly learned the lesson, correct responses to the activity were reinforced, and incorrect responses were corrected. Mehan termed this elicitation sequence IRE (Initiation, Reply, Evaluation). IRE was present in every class we observed, although other forms of instruction were also used in about one quarter of the classes. The elicitation sequence was followed by closure, which signaled the end of the lesson and the beginning of something new.

The great majority of elicitation episodes were what Mehan termed product elicitations, a series of questions and answers designed to elicit correct, factual responses. In a minority of classes we also observed process elicitations, a series of questions designed to elicit learners' views and opinions. Elicitations designed to foster and garner expressions of learners' creativity or critical thinking were evident

in only 4 of the 20 class sites. During lessons, communication was almost always teacher to learner and learner to teacher. Free-flowing learner to learner communication occurred in only a small minority of classes.

In our analysis of instruction's structure and content, we categorized the observed classes into two general types. The first was discrete skills instruction, characterized by teacher-prepared and teacher-delivered lessons focusing on conveyance of factual information and learners' literal recall; the predominance of commercially published materials; lessons organized into distinct time periods with a clear beginning and end; and a focus on the skills that encompass traditional subject areas such as reading, writing, and math. Although we identified subcategories of discrete skills instruction, the category as a whole accounted for 16 of the 20 classes in our sample.

The second category was making meaning instruction, characterized by a focus on problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, and social awareness in addition to basic skills; an emphasis on process rather than structure; collaboration between teachers and learners; use of authentic materials; and teachers who functioned more as facilitators than as conveyors. Only 4 of the 20 classes were classified as using making meaning instruction.

In short, the instruction we observed was nearly always teacher-directed and oriented toward conveying concrete, factual knowledge—the form of instruction we have termed discrete skills instruction. Moreover, there were strong parallels between what we observed in adult literacy education and what researchers have observed in elementary education.

What accounts for the similarities between adult literacy education and elementary education practices? All teachers in our study had themselves experienced at least 12 years of elementary and secondary education, and the great majority had trained as elementary or secondary school teachers and taught in the K–12 system. Given this protracted and intense level of socialization, teaching behavior was deeply ingrained. Moreover, learners expected the kind of instruction we witnessed. In fact, in one of the few episodes where a teacher deviated from the norm, a learner negatively sanctioned the teacher.

Second, many teachers are aware they have a relatively short period of time to prepare learners and believe learners want and need to progress as quickly as possible toward achieving the goal of passing the GED tests. Given this sense of urgency, they employ a teacher-directed, discrete skills oriented form of instruction, believing this is the fastest and most efficient way to move learners forward.

Implications

As we observed these patterns over and over again, we could not refrain from questioning whether we were seeing good practice or bad practice. After considerable reflection, we came to the conclusion that it depends. If the essence of becoming literate is the acquisition of concrete skills and factual knowledge, the norm has merit. Indeed, it would be expected that highly systematic and focused efforts at factual, discrete skills instruction would yield good gains on most of the tests used for learning-outcome accountability because these tests tend to measure this kind of skill acquisition.

If, however, literacy also entails critical thinking, problem-solving ability, oral and written communication proficiency, creativity, and an understanding of how society works, the norm we observed is substantially deficient. Will adult literacy education defined as the current norm equip learners for success in higher education? Will it aid them in gaining good jobs with benefits and a future of increasing earnings? Will it help them be more effective parents and better citizens? Although a definitive answer to these fundamental questions is beyond the scope of this study, as researchers and literacy professionals we are concerned that the answer may be "probably not."

If the literacy instruction that represents the norm needs reform, the issue becomes how to accomplish it. Although professional development is an obvious strategy, we doubt that additional doses of short-term, skill-oriented workshops will be sufficient. Teachers have become socialized into their ways of teaching. For many, it is the way they know best, and it is what learners expect. Changing this behavior may well take what amounts to a very protracted and intense resocialization effort.

Meeting Learners' Needs

[What Teachers Try to Accomplish, pp. 32–36]

In our interviews, we asked teachers to explain what they had intended to accomplish in the class we had observed previously. Their intentions included: teach life skills, create a positive learning atmosphere, interest and engage learners, develop independent and self-motivated learners, help learners pass the GED tests, and meet learners' needs. Meeting learners' needs was by far the most commonly expressed intention.

Despite this, we saw little evidence of systematic assessment of learner needs or evaluation directed toward determining whether individual or group needs were

met. Teachers seemed to have generalized conceptions of learners' needs, developed through their experience and supported by their own belief systems. In response to these generalized conceptions, they typically geared lessons to the entire class rather than to the specifically identified needs of individuals or groups. There were exceptions, but these were the distinct minority.

Implications

With the advent of the Workforce Investment Act and its concomitant emphasis on accountability, learners' needs and how they should be addressed has become an important issue. Should the goals and objectives for adult literacy be established for the entire federal adult literacy system by legislative act, or should goals and objectives vary according to the diverse needs of learners? If the answer is the latter rather than the former, the issue of how to meet learners' needs through instruction takes on considerable significance. Instruction based on teachers' generalized conceptions of learners' needs may be insufficient for an adult literacy system if it wants to be needs-oriented. To effectively address learners' needs through instruction, teachers may need to acquire and use the skills and procedures for class-based needs assessment, curriculum development based on assessed needs, and systematic evaluation designed to determine whether assessed needs have been met.

Tardiness and Tuning Out

[Sanctioning, pp. 61–66]

Although the content and structure of instruction of adult literacy education and elementary and secondary education are markedly similar, differences become apparent when we examine classroom processes.

Classroom behavior is governed by a series of social norms, rules that shape social process. These norms became visible when we observed positive and negative sanctioning, when we observed the behaviors rewarded and not tolerated.

Across our sample, we observed considerable tardiness and tuning out. Learners arrived up to an hour late, and tuning out ranged from short episodes of staring into space to sleeping in class. In contrast to most other educational settings, here these behaviors were almost universally tolerated. When learners were tardy, they were expected to engage on their own, and the class continued without interruption. Like tardiness, tuning out was rarely sanctioned negatively, and learners generally reengaged after a tuning-out episode. Neither tardiness nor tuning out seemed to have a major impact on social process. When these behaviors were

exhibited, they were scarcely acknowledged. It is likely that these behaviors were tolerated simply because teachers considered them a reality of the adult literacy classroom, a reality that they had to accept because they had little choice.

Implications

Although tardiness and tuning out represent periods when learners are clearly not engaged in the instruction, we believe that there is a more important concern. To a significant extent, tardiness is symptomatic of instrumental issues interfering with attendance, such as childcare, transportation, and work. Tuning out may be caused by fatigue, failure to comprehend the lesson, lessons that are too easy, or other sources that interfere with learning. We suspect that the most important significance of these behaviors is that they may be signals of impending dropping out, and dropping out is an endemic problem for adult literacy education.

Through systematic research, we need to better understand the relationship between tardiness and tuning out and dropping out. This could lead to diagnostic procedures that would enable teachers to identify learners at risk of dropping out while there is still an opportunity to intervene. It might also lead to new ways of teaching that could reduce the threat of dropping out.

Learner-Centered Instruction

[Directing and Complying, pp. 69–73]

In Chapter Four, we discussed an apparent contradiction. Although teachers' responses in their interviews suggested they wanted to be learner-centered, our classroom observations quite clearly showed that instruction was highly teacher-directed. If teachers controlled the classroom, and they intended to be learner-centered, how could a teacher-directed system of instruction result? Our answer harks back to the concept of socialization. We concluded that teachers are so intensely socialized into a teacher-centered form of instructing that they teach in teacher-centered ways, despite intentions to be learner-centered. Although teacher-centeredness characterized instruction, we found that teachers behaved in learner-centered ways in their affective relationships with learners. In this sense, learner-centeredness functioned not as a teaching technology or methodology but as a set of values that guided teacher–learner interactions.

Implications

There needs to be more discussion about the meaning of learner-centeredness and the kind of instruction that produces it. If being learner-centered is as desirable as the prescriptive literature suggests, it should be more fully reflected in learners' instruction.

Classroom Discussion

[Expressing Values, Attitudes, and Opinions and Sharing Ideas, pp. 76–79]

In more than three quarters of the classes we observed, teachers rarely solicited learners' values, attitudes, or opinions, and learners rarely volunteered them. If such expression did occur, it was typically episodic and functioned as a brief aside rather than being integrated into the lesson or becoming a segue to further discussion. As a result, free-flowing discussions in which learners interacted with other learners were rare. There are two possible explanations why adult literacy education classrooms are not fertile terrains for the discussion of values, attitudes, and opinions and why free-flowing discussion was so rare. The first, which is most plausible, relates to the function of the lesson. As we have said earlier, the teacher-planned, teacher-delivered lesson was the basic unit of instruction in the classes we observed. Teachers may consider the expression of values, attitudes, and opinions, and discussion around them, to be deviations from the planned lesson that might deter completion of planned activities.

In two of the few free-flowing discussions we witnessed, the discussion became acrimonious. Thus, teachers may avoid open discussion because they fear it might get out of hand or they lack the facilitation skills to guide the discussion into something of educational value.

Implications

The lack of open discussion in which learners freely express values, attitudes, and opinions may impede development of important oral literacy skills. Even for the highly educated, most of the business of life is conducted orally, and the ability to make a convincing oral argument is an important skill for success in the family, community, and workplace. Furthermore, discussions in which learners interact with other learners can develop important group dynamics skills, such as knowing when to assert or defer and when to speak or listen.

If lack of facilitation skills is a reason why teachers fail to introduce discussion into the classroom, developing such skills is an obvious topic for

professional development. If teachers fail to introduce discussion because they do not believe it is an important aspect of literacy learning, curriculum development is warranted.

Community

[Functioning as a Community, pp. 79–86]

Consistent with the literature on community in elementary and secondary education, we defined community as a collective sense of belonging among the members of a class. As the literature suggests and as our findings reflect, community requires an environment of safety, trust, and peer acceptance.

Although nearly all the classes we observed exhibited some elements of community, in only about a quarter of the classes was community pervasive. We found three factors associated with community: learners collaborating with learners, teacher support for a community environment, and inclusion.

In some cases, learners collaborated freely with other learners in helping relationships and learning, without prompting from the teacher. In other cases, learners were directed to collaborate in activities, such as editing. Collaborative relationships among learners were not common, however, and tended to be short in duration when they occurred. In no case did we observe learner work groups with stable memberships working together over a protracted period of time. This, we surmise, was at least partially a result of constantly changing class membership produced by high attrition and absenteeism.

From our teacher interviews, it was clear that most considered establishing an environment conducive to community—an environment of respect and trust—important. Our observations indicated that most teachers acted in ways to create such an environment at least some of the time. For example, teachers praised learners liberally and seldom sanctioned them negatively. Some teachers shared information about their personal lives with learners, thus reducing social distance, and some teachers leveled authority relationships through such mechanisms as writing while learners wrote and interjecting episodes of humorous banter.

Inclusion is the act of purposefully and systematically inducting new learners into the group through such activities as formal introductions and inclusion exercises. It is an important process if new members are to achieve the sense of belonging necessary for community. As most of the classes we observed practiced continuous enrollment, we witnessed the enrollment of many new learners during the

course of this study. Yet inclusion activities were very rare. In most cases, learners were simply asked to take a seat and expected to engage on their own.

Implications

As our research did not include an outcome assessment component, we cannot infer with certainty that community has a positive effect on learning. Nevertheless, because of the elementary and secondary education literature that concludes community has beneficial effects on such things as dropout rates, social engagement, and academic success, it is reasonable to hypothesize that community is an important ingredient of successful learning in adult literacy education. The relationship between community and important instructional outcomes in adult literacy education needs to be ascertained through additional research. Assuming that community is indeed important, we need to train teachers in how to develop and maintain it. In our opinion, the place to start is inclusion. We suspect that helping teachers understand that inclusion is important and equipping them with brief but effective inclusion activities to use with new learners could provide important gains with little expenditure of resources.

Shaping Factors

Enrollment Turbulence

[Enrollment Turbulence, pp. 87-89]

Most of the classes we observed ran in cycles roughly equivalent to semesters. In the beginning of each cycle, classes were filled to capacity, but attrition would take its toll on enrollment. To maintain adequate class size for funding and instructional purposes and to serve new learners seeking to enroll, learners were added to most classes on a continuous basis. New learners were typically slotted into any class with available seats, regardless of their skill level. Consequently, it was very difficult for most programs to group learners by skill level. The result was both mixed skill levels and continuous enrollment.

Teachers with experience in K-12 systems—in which the same students are present in June as in September and classes are grouped by skill level—were ill-equipped to deal with this enrollment turbulence. In very mixed-level classes that employed a group format, it was difficult to target instruction at an appropriate level. If teachers targeted instruction at the GED level, lower-level learners were sometimes left in the dark. If they targeted instruction at lower levels, upper-level learners sometimes became bored.

In classes in which individualized instruction was used to deal with mixed levels, it was often difficult for teachers to render help to learners when needed. Without this help, learning became stalled. Continuous enrollment made it difficult to create a sense of community because class membership was always in flux. It also made it difficult for teachers to use complex teaching methods, such as project-based learning or peer coaching, because learner work group membership was so unstable. Based on everything we have observed, continuous enrollment and mixed skill levels are two of the most serious and understated problems facing adult literacy education today. In fact, we are concerned that a very dangerous cycle may be at work: High learner attrition breeds continuous enrollment and mixed levels, continuous enrollment and mixed levels reduce the effectiveness of instruction, and less effective instruction in turn contributes to high learner attrition.

Implications

As continuous enrollment and, to some extent, mixed-level classes are products of high dropout rates, and it is unreasonable to expect that the dropout problem will be solved either soon or easily, we will probably have continuous enrollment and mixed levels into the future. Better ways to manage continuous enrollment and mixed levels are possible, however. First, a systematic search should be made for the best practices in managing continuous enrollment and mixed skill levels. After these practices have been evaluated for efficacy and feasibility, they should be disseminated to teachers and program administrators through professional development and other means. Dealing more effectively with continuous enrollment and mixed levels is achievable, and doing so would have a very significant positive impact on adult learning experiences.

Funding Pressure

[Funding Pressure, pp. 90-92]

Funding pressure affects what happens in adult literacy classrooms in at least two ways. First, funding source regulations and eligibility requirements often determine what kind of learners will be served, the type of instruction they receive, and how long they can stay. Second, the amount of funding affects such things as available hours of instruction and class size. In one class we observed, funding source regulations restricted learners to 12 weeks of instruction. After that time, students were not allowed to participate in the program, regardless of whether they had achieved their learning goals. We observed classes that had become dysfunctional because of funding declines. In one underfunded class, 40 learners were present, and some could not find seats.

Several of the welfare-sponsored classes we visited had lost substantial enrollments because of welfare reform.

Implications

It is easy to say that we need more funding for adult literacy because, of course, we clearly do. However, when we look at how funding affects instruction, it is clear that funding allocation is as severe a problem as the amount of available funds. Differing eligibility requirements and regulations for programs funded under the Adult and Family Literacy Act, welfare, and Department of Labor programs create fragmentation at the local level that ill serves learners. Although the Workforce Investment Act is designed to address some of the allocation problems, it can only do so if adult educators at the local level participate substantially in the decision-making processes WIA establishes. We need to make funding-related challenges known and see that they are acted upon at the state and national policy levels.

Professional Development

As noted at the beginning of this report, instruction is the most fundamental process of adult literacy education, and the classroom is the most basic organizational unit. For this reason, efforts to improve the quality of adult literacy must focus on instruction and classroom behavior. When all means of improving instruction quality are considered, professional development stands out as the most important. At the state level, development of comprehensive, well-planned professional development systems is vital. This requires leadership, strategic planning, and resources.

In the Adult Education Act as amended by the National Literacy Act of 1991, 10 percent of the state grant was mandated for professional development, and another 5 percent was mandated for professional development, special demonstration projects, or both. In short, professional development was a mandated activity. Under the 1998 Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Title II of WIA, 12.5 percent of the state allotment *may* be used for state leadership activities, including professional development. Expenditures for professional development are permitted but not required.[1] If professional development is to receive the resources it needs, the law needs to be changed to once again make staff development a mandated function and to increase funds available for it.

[1] http://www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/AdultEd/InfoBoard/legis.html

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APPENDIX: THE FUTURE

For the staff at NCSALL-Rutgers, completion of the classroom dynamics study represents the beginning rather than the end. We have finished data collection on a sequel that focuses on classroom dynamics in adult ESOL instruction. More important, in collaboration with the New Brunswick Public School Adult Learning Center, NCSALL-Rutgers is establishing the National Labsite for Adult Literacy Education, a five-year project that will enable us to build on some of the key findings of the classroom dynamics study. In the labsite, we will conduct four studies briefly described below.

Engagement

From our work on the classroom dynamics study, we suspect that students' engagement in classroom activities takes place along a continuum. We observed that, in some cases, all students were intently engaged and focused on the lesson, but in others, some students were engaged while others exhibited passive tuning-out behavior, such as staring blankly into space. In the extreme, we noted a significant amount of active tuning out, such as taking self-proclaimed breaks, wandering about the classroom, and sleeping. In light of national data that found an approximately 60 percent dropout rate after 12 hours of instruction and an 80 percent dropout rate after 30 hours of instruction (NEAEP, 1994), engagement may be highly significant because disengagement may be symptomatic of impending dropping out.

Although in the classroom dynamics study we observed clear signs of engagement and disengagement, the data were not sufficient to understand what caused this behavior. The key to causality lies in what students were thinking and feeling as they engaged or disengaged, and that could not be determined from observation alone. Lacking this understanding, we could not ascertain a connection between disengagement and dropping out. Understanding such a connection, which we strongly suspect exists, would be highly significant because it might lead to classroom interventions that promote engagement and ameliorate dropping out. Indeed, if research were to lead to interventions that significantly reduced student attrition, the benefits to adult literacy education would be enormous.

To pursue such research, NCSALL-Rutgers intends to employ a method that we refer to as video-playback-interview (VPI). First, a class will be videotaped. Then, the tape will be edited to screen out material extraneous to the research focus on engagement. Several days later, the tape will be played to critical actors in the incidents, enabling them to "relive" the behavior. While the subjects view the tape, they will be interviewed about their thoughts and feelings at the time, and the interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Finally, the video record and interview

transcript will be linked, using a technology called V-Prism. Hence, we will have the video of learners engaging and disengaging and their reasons for this behavior on the same record. V-Prism allows us to code video as if it were text. The video data will then be coded and analyzed in accordance with standard practice in qualitative research.

A second stage of this project will focus on developing and field testing student retention interventions based on what we have learned in the initial research phase.

Literacy Acquisition

James Gee (1996), a social linguist who focuses on literacy, theorizes that mastery of literacy requires two linked processes. The first he terms learning, or the formal education around literacy typically acquired in school. Through learning, students gain the meta-level knowledge that enables them to understand and analyze text. Basic decoding and grammar are examples of meta-level knowledge. Although what Gee calls learning is necessary for literacy, it alone is insufficient. Mastery—true fluency—requires what Gee terms acquisition. Through acquisition, students learn such things as appropriate usage and how to convey and interpret meaning in particular contexts. Acquisition, which is necessary for fluency, is rarely taught. Usually, acquisition takes place purposefully and systematically in social settings such as the home, work, and community.

Gee's theory suggests that what happens outside of class is just as important to becoming literate as what happens in class. This theory leads to several important research questions:

- To what extent are students purposefully and systematically engaging in literacy acquisition activities outside of class?
- If they are not, why not?
- If they are, how are they doing so?
- What is the connection between literacy learning in the classroom and literacy acquisition in natural settings?

From the perspective of practice, the connections between literacy learning in the classroom and out-of-class literacy acquisition are particularly important because some teaching practices may abet literacy acquisition while others impede it. If we understood the practices that support literacy acquisition and were able to capitalize on them, the implications for improving student progress are substantial and obvious.

Another NCSALL study, Literacy Practices of Adult Learners (LPAL), has explored the relationship between two instructional factors—learner involvement and life-contextualized learning—and changes in out-of-class reading practices. Our learning acquisition study will build on the findings from the LPAL study and adapt aspects of its research protocol and instruments.

The LPAL study found that changes in home use of literacy skills may be more dependent on life events than the two instructional factors they examined. For example, if a learner's child was diagnosed with asthma, home use of literacy increased and changed. The literacy acquisition study could look at ways for teachers to identify and build on these life events to increase use of literacy skills outside the classroom.

Fifteen students will be selected from NCSALL labsite classes and paid to participate in the study. Because it is important to understand the connection between what happens in class and out-of-class acquisition, we will use the VPI methodology to develop a record of in-class participation for each subject. The classroom video will record subjects' behavior in the classroom, and the interview portion of the VPI process will gather data on students' perceptions of their learning.

Data on literacy acquisition outside class will be recorded through an audio log. Subjects will be given mini tape recorders, which they will use to record their literacy acquisition behavior on a scheduled basis. The logs will then be transcribed, and the subjects will be interviewed, usually in their homes, to permit elaboration and explanation of the audio log data. Data will be coded and analyzed using appropriate qualitative research methods and procedures. This study will lead to advice on instructional design that will support purposeful and systematic out-of-class acquisition activities.

Teachers' Knowledge and Classroom Practice

In the classroom dynamics study, NCSALL-Rutgers found an apparent contradiction. Although teachers expressed the intention to be student-centered and to meet students' individual needs, their teaching typically followed a pattern that Mehan (1979) termed Initiation, Response, Evaluation (IRE) in his study of an elementary school class. IRE begins with the initiation of a teacher-prepared lesson, followed by an elicitation. The elicitation is essentially a series of question-and-answer episodes designed to assess students' comprehension and convey content.

IRE is teacher directed, not student-centered, and although it may meet students' needs in general, it does not focus on students' specific, individual,

expressed needs. To explain the contradiction, the study inferred that training and experience socialize teachers into an IRE framework, and teachers therefore fail to act on their more idealized intentions. This apparent contradiction leads to several important research questions.

- Why do teachers teach as they do?
- To what extent is there a discontinuity between teachers' idealized vision for their teaching and the way they actually do teach?
- If such a discontinuity does exist, why?

An understanding of why teachers teach as they do requires understanding at least two components. The first is teachers' beliefs about teaching and their sources of teaching knowledge. The second is the shaping and mediating factors that cause teachers to "bend" from the ideal in their actual practice.

These questions are critical for staff development. If teaching in adult literacy education is greatly influenced by teachers' prior experience with and training in elementary and secondary education, adult literacy education needs teaching models that promote a more effective adaptation from the K–12 to the adult literacy context.

For this study, we will select 15 teachers from the NCSALL labsite. First, we will interview each for at least two hours to gather background data and to record the teacher's perspective on teaching, including teaching philosophy, goals for students, and motivation to teach. It represents the ideal from the teacher's point of view.

Subsequently, we will use the VPI method to gather data on the way teachers actually teach. Teachers will be videotaped as they teach, and the video will be edited to eliminate extraneous data. Next, teachers and the researcher will view the edited video together. As they watch, teachers will be interviewed about why they did what they did and how they derived the knowledge to teach that way.

In addition to functioning as a data collection technique addressing the above research questions, VPI may have important potential as a staff development intervention. Such an intervention is quite consistent with the teacher reflection group strategy we intend to employ in staff development. For this reason, we will assess the impact on teachers who have served as research subjects, and if the results are positive, we will develop and field test a staff development intervention using the video technology as reflective feedback.

Continuous Enrollment and Mixed Skill Levels

In the classroom dynamics study, we identified a highly deleterious dynamic. As enrollment declined in classes because of high attrition, new students were added, often on a weekly basis. This happened because funding was linked to enrollment, many new students sought immediate service, and a decline in enrollment sometimes threatened a class's viability.

Coupled with continuous enrollment, we found mixed skill levels—classes in which students' skill levels sometimes ranged from near nonreaders to those ready to pass the GED tests. Mixed levels were often caused by difficulty in managing the flow of new enrollees. For example, if a GED class had low enrollment and a pool of lower-level students sought enrollment, the low-level enrollees were often assigned to the GED class.

Continuous enrollment creates a high level of instability in classes, and this, in turn, makes it difficult for classes to function as effective social systems. Mixed skill levels make it very difficult for teachers to gear instruction to learners' appropriate skill levels. Together, continuous enrollment and mixed levels create a situation for which most teachers are unprepared.

Although continuous enrollment and mixed skill levels will probably not change until student attrition rates are greatly reduced, there may be ways to manage them better. In one program, for example, students were organized into cohorts that received a study skills intervention until the cohorts were large enough to move into a class as intact units.

The continuous enrollment/mixed levels project aims to identify and field test classroom management practices that either eliminate continuous enrollment and mixed levels or ameliorate their deleterious effects. First, we will identify a body of promising practices through a literature search, the NLA listserv, and various National Institute for Literacy listservs. Short descriptions of promising practices will then be developed and reviewed by a panel of experts, program directors, teachers, and researchers. The four or five practices the panel rates most highly will be thoroughly assessed through site visits and a review of persistence and outcome data.

Based on the assessment, the two or three most promising practices will be field tested at the NCSALL-Rutgers labsite and assessed. Classroom management practices proven effective in reducing continuous enrollment and mixed levels—or their effects—will then be disseminated through NCSALL.